

THE

VICTIMS of the
MAMERTINE.

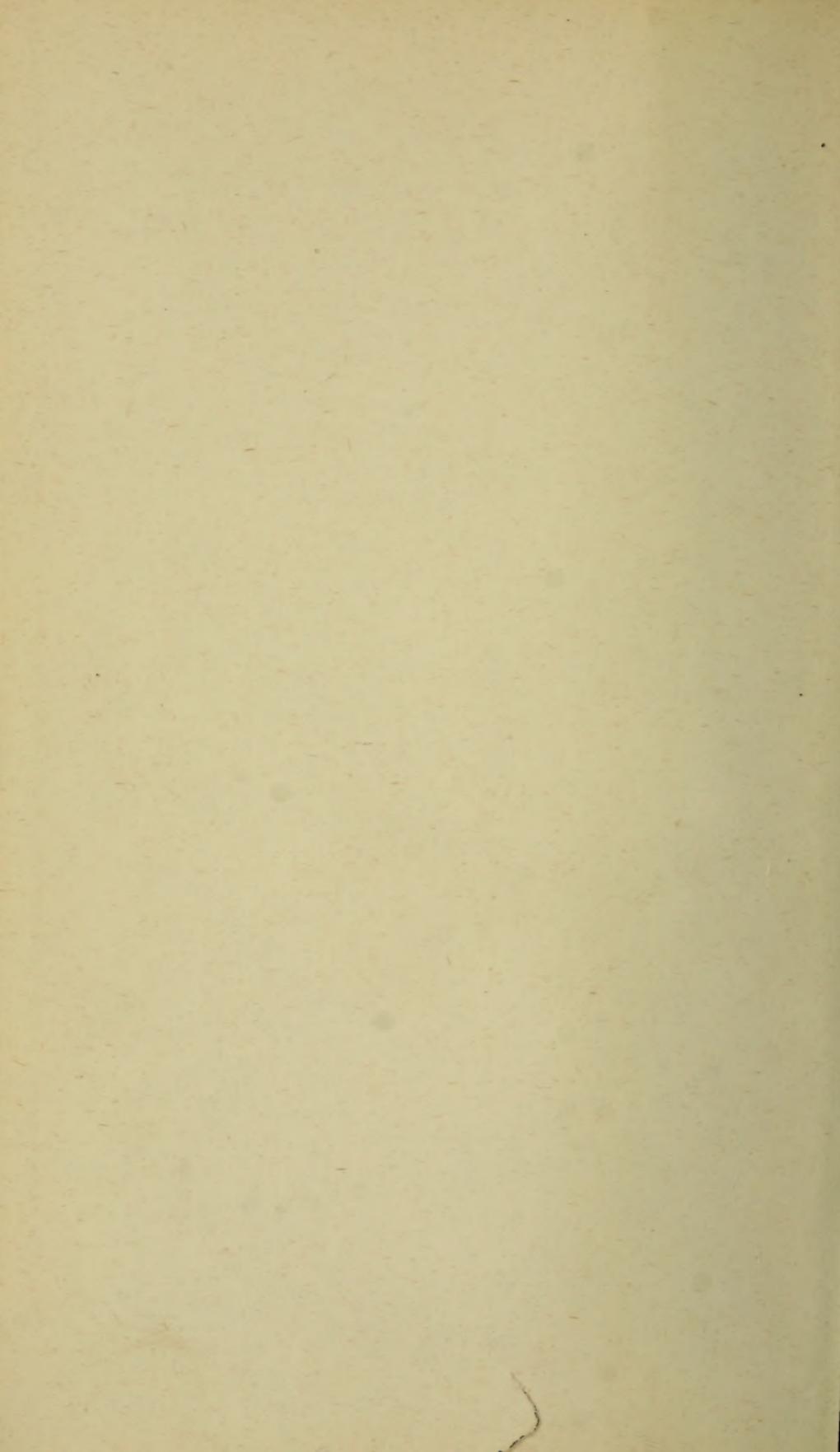
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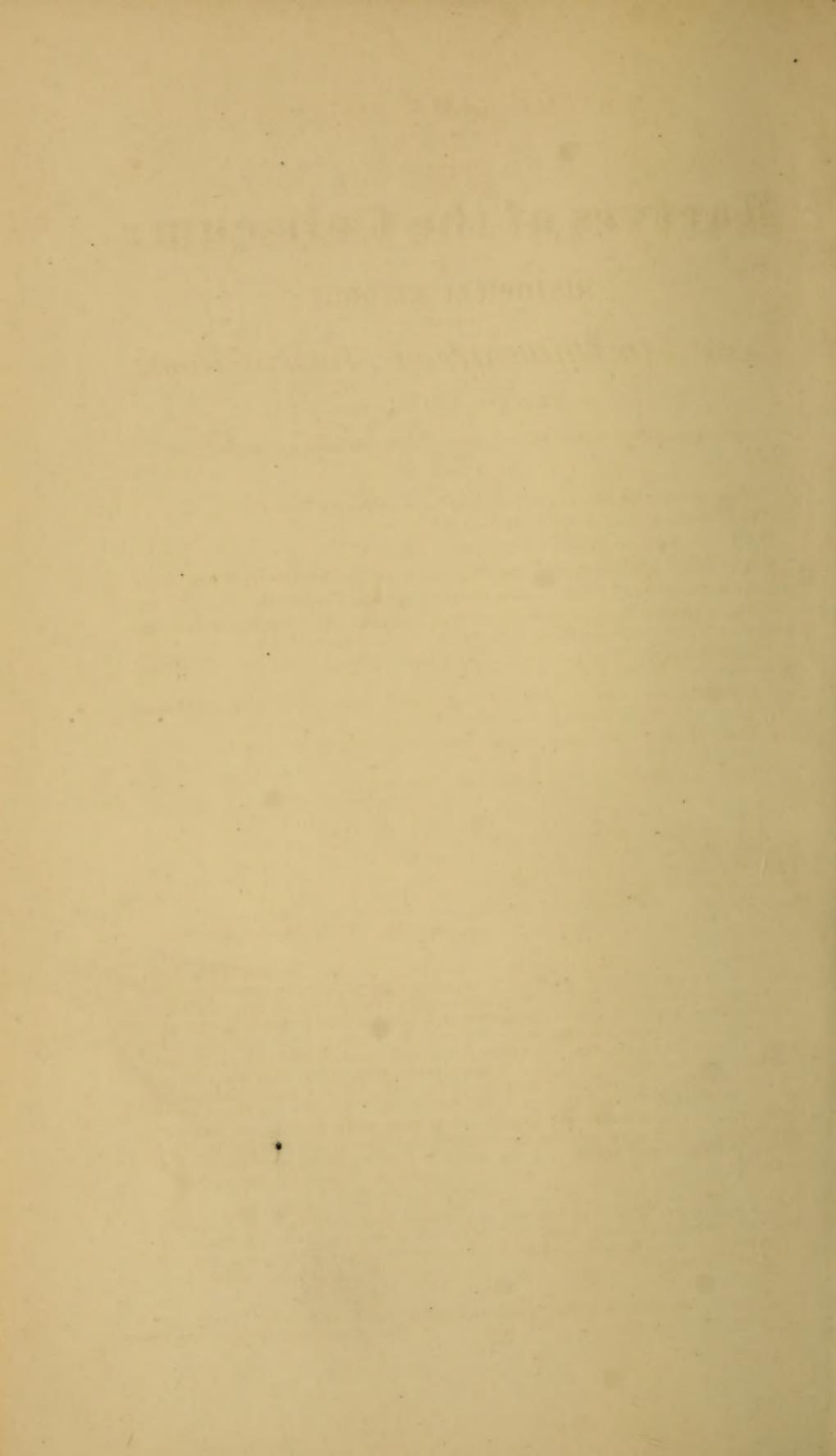
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Your most humble and devoted servant,

JOANNES SIMEONI, SECRETARY.

REV. A. J. O'REILLY, Miss. Ap., TORONTO.

ROME: Given at the College of the Propaganda, March 4, 1874.

Recommendation of his Grace the Archbishop of Toronto.

We recommend to the Faithful of our Diocese "THE HISTORY OF THE COLISEUM AND ITS MARTYRS," written by the Rev. A. J. O'Reilly, Miss. Ap., a Priest of our Diocese.

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# THE VICTIMS

OF THE

# MAMERTINE.

*Scenes from the Early Church.*

SECOND SERIES.

BY

REV. A. J. O'REILLY, D.D.,

*Missionary Apostolic, author of the "Martyrs of the Coliseum."*

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## CHAPTER I.

### INTRODUCTION.

#### I.

**T**N treating of the Saints of the Mamertine, we feel like one sent to a graveyard long since abandoned, and told to give the history of those buried in its sacred precincts.

A few monuments only have survived the wreck of time, and tell the names of those who were players on the stage of life in generations gone by.

“ You ask me, Valerianus, worthy pontiff of Christ,” wrote Prudentius, “ what inscriptions are engraved on the numberless tombs of the saints I have seen in the city of Romulus, and what are the names of these blessed martyrs. I find it difficult to answer. Many tombs, indeed, bear written in small letters either the name of the martyrs or

some epitaph, but the rest merely indicate the number of martyrs they contain.”\*

Contemplating the number of martyrs that suffered in Rome during the ten great persecutions of the Church, it would seem a Herculean task to give the history of the victims of the Mamertine. There is a strange passage in the “Revelations of St. Bridget”: “Take a hundred square feet of earth, sow it with corn, each grain a finger’s breadth apart and bearing a hundred-fold, greater will be the number of martyrs from the time St. Peter came to Rome to the time Celestine abdicated.”

The Catacombs alone tell of hundreds of thousands. Yet of this immense number of happy souls the Mamertine was honored with only a few, and these the noblest names on the records of the Church. There are many martyrs mentioned in the Acts cast into vile and dark prisons, but as the *Tullian* or *Mamertine* is not mentioned we cannot treat them as victims of the prison. This prison was destined for political captives; for the hapless sons of the upper ten on whom fortune frowned or whose ambition, like the

\* Pruden., “De Coronis,” ii.

demons of Simon Magus, raised them aloft to let them fall with greater ignominy.

Therefore, on the Christian page of its history we have persons of position and fame. This reflection bears with it an obvious consolation for the reader. Being remarkable men, enjoying the first position in the city, and feared for their wealth and influence, their lives were better known, and consequently their acts are more genuine. Thus the records of the martyrs of this prison, with a few exceptions, are a collection of the most authentic acts, not less so because teeming with sensation and wonder. We need not build castles of fancy or climb imaginary rainbows to gather feathers from the fleecy clouds; far beyond the assumptions of thought are the simple and touching scenes we quote from the sublime history of the Church—the records of the Providence of God over the cradle of Christianity.

The work is the fruit of a second visit to the Eternal City, and a further examination of the notes that gave birth to "The Martyrs of the Coliseum." Leaving the cares of missionary life to more able hands, it was our labor of love to take down again the mouldy

tomes from dusky shelves, and bring to light the beautiful and interesting records preserved with such scrupulous care in the venerable archives of the Benedictine Library at Monte Cassino, as well as the Augustinian and Dominican Libraries in Rome.

The reader will find in almost every chapter a link between the past and the present, maintained either through the devotion that still exists towards those early heroes of Christianity, in the notices of those churches where their relics are still enshrined or honored, or in the similarity of events that prove the same Providence guiding the Church.

In treating of the Saints of the Mamertine, we are of necessity obliged to include names already well known; but we hope in the way of detail to furnish much that is new, and to treat the same in a manner at once original and interesting.

It is neither our intention to enter into any critical analysis of dates, nor to refute various and strange conjectures advanced by incredulous or malicious writers, who build their opinions on false data and impugn facts received by history and tradition. Such is the denial that St. Peter was ever in Rome.

When men, bearing all the appearance of education and sanity, can question such a fact, what wonder they should cast doubts on the history of his imprisonment, the place of his martyrdom and interment?

Bending with reverential awe over much that is marvellous and interesting in the history of the past, our work is neither polemic nor controversial. We seek to instruct through the channel of facts, to edify by the sublime lessons taught in the infant school of our faith, culling flowers from the roadside of history to present to the reader a bouquet of lasting fragrance by means of the virtuous and pious sentiments they suggest.

As the bee gathers honey from every flower that decks the plain, we have collected facts from the treasures of ancient literature, both sacred and profane. Translations, quotations, and traditions are linked together to make the chain. We have occasionally given the *ipsissima verba* of others, with only a reference to the original source in the footnotes, and thus we may frequently lay ourselves open to the charge of plagiarism so commonly preferred against authors. However, we have dipped into sources not gen-

erally known, and hence flatter ourselves we have gathered a few chapters of useful, instructive reading, especially for youth.

Like one who brushes cobwebs from the old paintings in our ancestral halls, bringing to better view the grand historic shades of the past, we present this work, as the "Martyrs of the Coliseum," to the indulgent criticism of pious Christians, who will find even in its rude dress much to encourage and cheer in the sorrows and troubles of human vicissitudes. It is to be regretted that many modern historians, pandering to a popular prejudice, place in the foreground of their pictures the heroes of paganism, who were at best tyrants and murderers of the human race, whose fame is often but the record to posterity of the triumph of injustice, whilst the champions of religion and justice—the great before God—whose praises shall be written on the imperishable monuments of the eternal city of Jerusalem, are ignored and despised. 'Tis to vindicate the saints of Christianity, to recall, from records that are dead to modern languages, the names and glories of heroes who fought the battles of the great Jehovah and marked

with their blood the path we should follow, we give to the reader the thrilling records of sufferings, of virtues, of triumphs, that are echoed in the title—"THE VICTIMS OF THE MAMERTINE."

## II.

ON cloudy days the mountains, rising over the distant horizon, are not easily distinguished from the mists that crown their summits; but as we approach nearer, the blue cliffs stand out in bold reality above the clouds. Thus, when we look far back through the haze of history, the shadows of legend are easily mingled with the realities of record; but on closer investigation the grand old monuments of the past stand forth in historic grandeur, cheering the mental vision with their hallowed memories and their venerable antiquity.

The Mamertine brings us far away into the mists of the past. Retracing our steps along the stream of time, we must pass the ten centuries of the temporal power of the Popes, the golden age of Cæsarism, and the warlike Tribunes of early Rome. After a journey of nearly

three thousand years we find ourselves amidst the rivulets that converge into the majestic current which first claimed importance in the vicissitudes of time. It is coeval with the days that heard the lamentations of Jeremias poured forth in the solitudes of Judea; when Nineveh and Babylon were the flourishing but ungrateful cities that blasphemed the name of the true God; when Solon was giving his laws at Athens, and Thales, following the course of the stars, startled the then known world with the first prophecy of the eclipse. Nations whose political influence is now felt at their antipodes, whose flags have braved a thousand years the battle and the breeze, were not then marked upon the map of the world. France and Germany were only known as barbarous tribes on the confines of civilization, and the cattle fed on the luxuriant meadows that covered the sites of London, Paris, and Berlin.

Commenced by a shepherd king six hundred and forty years before the Christian era, the Mamertine Prison is still intact, after the wreck and ruin of nearly three thousand years. The Cloacæ have drained the city of Rome for twenty-four centuries; the

gigantic aqueducts that stride the Campagna in imperishable majesty claim a venerable antiquity; but the Mamertine served for the imprisonment of the refractory slaves employed in their construction. Seven hundred years older than the Pantheon, the Coliseum, or the palace of the Cæsars, the Mamertine is the most ancient and interesting relic of ancient Rome.

With a deep thrill of sympathy we visit the dungeons of the political inquisition at Venice, the prison of Tasso in the gloomy keeps of the castle of Ferrara, and the cell of the beautiful but ill-fated Cenci in the tomb of Adrian ; with inward indignation we have read of many a dark scene of cruelty and injustice in the feudal castles of the middle ages; of the prisons of usurped and tyrannical powers; of the Bastile, and the Tower of London; but their terrors pale into comforts compared with the thrilling records of the Mamertine.

Although many a guilty wretch has here found a merited finale to a career of crime, yet its rugged walls received the last sigh of the noblest and bravest of the children of men. Heroes, who fought with unflinching

bravery for their liberty and their country, were dragged here in chains and cast into this gloomy abode of infamy, to starve or be strangled by the public executioner. Here were immured tender virgins of princely rank, who were not guilty of any political intrigues, and whose love for faith and chastity made them the victims of tyranny and lust. Here were flung venerable pontiffs, whose crimes were their miracles, and martyrs, whose guilt was their intrepid profession of Christianity. Loathsome and revolting, yet there is no prison on earth that has witnessed more patient suffering, more interior joy. Angelic spirits have passed days and nights in attendance on the champions of Christ, dispelling the darkness with miraculous light, spreading delicious odors in the noisome atmosphere, and cheering the lonely hours with joyous strains of celestial music.\*

“How blest you consider yourselves when cast into the dungeons of the Costodiorum,” says Tertullian, addressing the martyrs thrown into those dismal prisons. “They are dark, but you are light in yourselves; they

\*In the following pages we shall give record of several miracles of this kind.

have chains, but you are free in God ; they have all the horrors of a miserable death, but you are bathed in the odors of celestial life.”\*

Therefore, besides its antiquity, the Mamertine must attract the pilgrim to the Eternal City, with other and more hallowed reminiscences. The spots where the martyrs suffered are shrines of Christian devotion. In sympathy, in admiration, the fervent spirit floats in fancy over places that witnessed scenes of cruelty or triumph ; shuddering at the blood-stained hand, the axe of the executioner, and the bleeding wounds of the sufferer, but kissing the smile of triumph and the crown the angels weave on the martyr’s brow.

### III.

IF the pilgrim to the Eternal City stand on the steps of the Church of St. Martina in the Forum, he will look in vain amidst the ruins of the past for some indication of this ancient and celebrated prison. Yet in that very position stood what in modern phrase-

\* “Orat. ad Mart.,” ch. ii.

ology would be called the court-rooms of the prison; there, too, could be heard the piercing cries of the condemned issuing in subdued tones from the dungeons beneath. The place is so changed and tradition so indistinct it is difficult to replace the original structure. We must sweep away in imagination the beautiful churches that Christian piety has erected over the ancient sanctuaries, the miserable houses that now mark the site of the ancient citadel, and ten or twelve feet of soil which has accumulated with the débris of the fallen city. We may still find the massive wall of the façade which ran sixty feet towards the Salita di Marforio. On this wall, with the rock of the Capitol behind, we build to the height of forty or fifty feet a double square block—a larger one raised on a smaller one—heavy and massive in its architecture, and unadorned, amidst brilliant temples and palaces, portrayed in its gloomy simplicity the odious purposes for which it was destined. All these superstructures have passed away; although they existed in the golden age of the Cæsars, they were swept down in the devastation that levelled the majestic buiid-

ings adorning the Forum and the slopes of the Capitol. The prisons underneath were left intact, and supported on their rock-built walls the fallen masses of the upper edifice. Modern piety has removed every vestige of those ruins, and built a beautiful church over the dungeons, sanctified by the presence and miracles of a vast number of martyrs.

The construction of those prisons proves their antiquity, for they bear the massive character of the Etruscan era. There are two chambers excavated out of solid blocks of Peperino. When in use, they were entered by apertures in the centre of the ceiling; now a commodious flight of stairs, constructed in the last century, leads to both chambers. The upper apartment, which is considered the most ancient, constructed by Ancus Martius in 640 before the Christian era, is sixteen feet high, twenty-two in breadth, and thirty in length. The lower prison, supposed to be the Tullian extension, is one of the most horrible dungeons that can be imagined. Through an aperture in the floor of the upper chamber the victim was cast into a low, dark, and rugged cell hewn out of the heart of the rock. The roof displays

immense architectural skill. Large masses of volcanic tufa are arranged in courses converging towards the centre, not on the principle of an arch, but extending horizontally to a point.\*

The absence of air and light and the effluvia of accumulated filth rendered this a horrid dungeon.

Although an inscription under the cornice of the entrance to the upper chamber, running thus

C . VIBIUS . C . F . RUFINUS . M . COCCEIVS .  
NERVA . COS . EX . S . C .

proves that it has been restored in the 22d year of the reign of Tiberius, and probably enlarged, still we have in its integrity the dismal prison so often referred to in the writings of Livy, Varro, Sallust, and Flaccus.

The description of the upper portion of the prison is lost to history. Yet it is certain there were other apartments besides the keeps. In the "Acts of St. Martina," who is supposed to have been confined in the Mamertine, we read there were many apart-

\* No mortar was used, but iron clamps were ingeniously worked into the joinings; they are not now visible. A similar kind of roof is seen in the tombs of the Tarquinii and Cære.

ments or chambers in her prison. In the "Acts of Pope Stephen" (acts of the highest authority), we find that the judge who condemned Tertullinus had his tribunal erected in the Mamertine. It would be absurd to imagine that the prefect would hold his court in one of those dungeons that have come down to us. The same is also proved by the "Acts of St. Alexander."

The front of the prison was not turned towards the Forum directly, but leaning a little towards the street formerly called *Vico Mamertino*, now *Salita di Marforio*. The position of the Gemonia stairs, which were on one side, gives sufficient indication that the entrance to the prison was not on the level of the street, but from the rear by a bridge.\* The fortifications of the Capitol were just behind, and of course the prison was separated. That the *Scale Gemonie* thus led to the prison is the opinion of all

\* We are aware that some have placed the *Scale Gemonie* on the Aventine and leading to the Tiber; but how can such arrangement stand with statements like the following from Valerius Maximus, writing of Crepione: "Corpusque ejus funesti cornificis manibus laceratum in Scalis Gemoniis jacens, magno cum horrore Fori Romani conspectum est." We might give several other similar quotations, but enough for our purpose. (See Cancellieri, page 33.)

modern antiquaries. On these stairs the bodies of those killed inside were cast naked and left exposed for some time to strike terror into the people; they were then dragged to the Tiber. Pliny relates, in his eighth book and Chapter 40, of a faithful dog which remained day and night by the body of his master, refusing food and howling piteously until death relieved him like his master from the sorrows of life—felt even by a dog!

A great deal of doubt exists concerning the object or meaning of the small door that is found in the lower prison, leading to a long subterranean gallery, similar to some of the passages in the Catacombs. Some will have that it is as ancient as the prison itself, and was a secret passage in conjunction with the Claudian prison,\* after the fashion of the Latomia of Syracuse, which has a similar subterranean catacomb annexed. This looks probable, as we know the Mamertine is but a reproduction of those famous prisons. Others will have that it is coeval with the changes made in the time of Tiberius, under the Consuls Vibius and Rufinus,

\* St. Nicholas in Carcere.

and was intended to lead off to the Cloaca the filth, water, etc., which must of necessity have accumulated in the prison. The passage in the "Acts of Chrysanthus and Daria" would seem to suppose this: "Quia Cloacarum cuniculis digesta domorum stercora illic jugiter decurrebant et in hoc decursorio ut diximus erat ima et lutea et ita tenebrosa custodia ut penitus lucifluus aer, nec signum illi diei nec vestigium aliquod lucis ostenderet."\* Yet there is no allusion made to this aqueduct by ancient writers, and modern antiquaries skilfully avoid it. On examination we find this subterranean passage leads over a hundred yards in the direction of the Forum. It has several avenues branching from it, but all closed by walls that are decidedly of ancient structure. It is low, damp, and rough. In the time of Panciroli, the lower prison was filled with dirt and water. He writes thus: "Se più vi sia questa e quella Dio lo sa, perche i ritorni ed uscite delle fontane tirate in Campidoglio hanno di modo riempito questa parte, che più non vi si puo calare." This may have arisen from the accumulation of filth and dirt. We are

\* Surius, 25th Oct.

inclined to believe the passage was an aqueduct intended for the sole use of the prison. The other passages leading from it may have been opened at the time it was made, for the sake of the sand so necessary in all ancient buildings.

Up to the time of the Decemvirs there was but one prison in Rome. Juvenal congratulates the ancestral city on this happy sign of prosperity and order:

“ Felices proavorum atavos felicia dicas  
Sæcula qui quondam sub regibus atque tribunis  
Viderunt uno contentam carcere Romam.”\*

This was the Tullian Prison. About 300 years after the building of Rome, the increased population, and with it the increased violation of the laws, called for more prison room. To restrain the ever-increasing audacity of a lawless people,\* Appius Claudius, who was afterwards himself a victim of the Tullian, built the famous prisons whose ruins are now shown under the Church of St. Nicholas in Carcere. They were famous, for, like the Tullian shrouded with horrors, here the victims of the circus passed the pain-

\* Sat. iii.

† “Ad terrorem crescentis audaciæ.”—Livy, dec. i. lib. i.

ful vigils of their immolation to make a Roman holiday; here many a noble and injured object of patrician oppression passed its gloomy threshold to bid farewell for years to home and daylight, and, too often, to life itself.

In its history there is record of one scene full of romance. An aged father is condemned to die of starvation. His daughter, a young mother, is permitted to visit him daily. Days passed, and still the old man lived, full of vigor and vital energy. The guards carefully searched the daughter, but she had no food concealed. The continued existence and even good health of their aged victim increased their astonishment. At length they watched, and, lo! the young mother is seen suckling her aged father with her infant's milk. The strange circumstance was bruited through the city; popular sympathy demanded the aged man's liberty, and a temple was raised over the prison to the goddess of filial piety. The dark and gloomy dungeons were closed for other victims: the prison became dear to the Roman people, who, in the midst of their moral degradation, could still love the beauty of virtue.

Byron's beautiful lines on this touching in-

stance of filial affection raise our thoughts from the gloomy horrors of the dungeons that form the theme of our study, to contemplate the sublimity of virtue in the filial piety of the woman's heart, so justly styled—

“ LA CARITA ROMANA.

“ There is a dungeon, in whose dim drear light  
What do I gaze on? Nothing. Look again!  
Two forms are slowly shadowed on my sight—  
Two insulated phantoms of the brain:  
It is not so; I see them full and plain—  
An old man, and a female young and fair,  
Fresh as a nursing mother, in whose vein  
The blood is nectar—but what does she there,  
With her unmantled neck, and bosom white and  
bare?

“ But here youth offers to old age the food,  
The milk of his own gift—it is her sire  
To whom she renders back the debt of blood  
Born with her birth. No; he shall not expire  
While in those warm and lovely veins the fire  
Of health and holy feeling can provide  
Great Nature's Nile, whose deep stream rises  
higher  
Than Egypt's river—from that gentle side  
Drink, drink and live, old man! Heaven's realm  
holds no such tide.

“ The starry fable of the Milky Way  
Has not thy story's purity; it is  
A constellation of a sweeter ray,  
And sacred Nature triumphs more in this

Reverse of her decree than in the abyss  
Where sparkle distant worlds : O holiest nurse !  
No drop of that clear stream its way shall miss  
To thy sire's heart, replenishing its source  
With life, as our freed souls rejoin the universe."

The prison where this scene took place is supposed by Baronius to be the Tullian itself. However, the weight of authority is against the learned Cardinal; the descriptions left us of the Mamertine by Livy, Varro, and Sallust leave no doubt of its position at the foot of the Capitol, looking down on the Forum, twenty feet below the surface, and horrible in its whole appearance.\*

Doubtless its present title of Mamertine, which, too, it has borne before the days of Christianity, may have supplied a reason for doubting its synonymous character with the ancient Tullian.† It is impossible to say with certainty whence this name came. Mamer-

\* "Imminens Foro."—*Livy*. "Media urbe."—*Ib.* "Cir-  
citer viginti pedes humi depresso."—*Sallust*. "Quæ sub  
terra Tullianum," etc.—*Varro*.

† Amongst the names given to this prison by ancient writers we find it frequently called Robur from its great strength, as also from the custom of confining prisoners in cells of wood, "in arcis robusteis," as we find in Festus. *Latomiæ* is another title given the Mamertine, from their similarity to the *Latomiæ* of Syracuse, dungeons hewn out of the solid rock by the tyrant Dionysius. The spot now occupied by this

tine is a name familiar in ancient history. There were several prefects of the city bore this name; there was a lake, a school, a street, and a saint called thus; consequently, the most common opinion is, this prison received its present name from one of the Mamertines, who enlarged or restored it during the Republic. Martinelli, whose opinion is adopted by some, gives a very ingenious and probable interpretation of this title and its origin.

Near is the Forum of Mars. This god was also called Mamers, as Festus writes: "Mamercus prænomen est Oscum a Marte dictum, ab eo quod Osci Martem Mamertem vocitent qui a Romanis detrac-  
tione unius syllabæ Mars appellatur." And Varro even more clearly gives the same idea: "Mamers idem quod Mars significat et Mamertinus idem quod Martius." If, then, the word Mamertinus has the same signification as Martius, may we not justly

prison was in all probability a stone quarry, and adapted to its present form by Ancus Martius—deepened into another dungeon by Tullian, whence the name. Varro writes: "In hoc pars quæ sub terra *Tullianum* ideo quod additum a Tullio rege." Historical critics cannot determine why it is so frequently called *Custodia publica* and *Custodia privata*. We find it often mentioned by these names in the "Acts of the Martyrs."

conclude the prison takes its name from its original founder, Ancus Martius especially as the origin of the name is lost far away in the remotest antiquity?

Whatever doubt may be thrown on the identity of this prison with the Tullian, no one has ever doubted but this is the Mamertine so frequently mentioned in the "Acts of the Martyrs"; that here the Apostles Peter and Paul were confined, and many other holy martyrs of the Church.

The places where the martyrs suffered are shrines of Christian devotion. The fervent soul loves to kneel on the spot sanctified with the blood of the sufferings of our forefathers in faith. In fancy the spirit floats over the scene of horror; it sees the executioners, the bleeding wounds, the smile of triumph, and the crown angels weave. It is not necessary to explain to the children of faith why the Church flings so much veneration around the places once sanctified by martyrs' suffering and triumph. The spots hallowed with the memories of awful suffering are many about Rome; perhaps none of a deeper hue than the Mamertine.

Here many a brave martyr passed the

vigil of his awful death. The anticipation of pain is sometimes greater than its realization; so the victims cast into this gloomy prison suffered in thought the direst agonies of martyrdom. They were supported, it is true, by the divine grace, but the sensibilities of humanity were not suppressed, and the martyrs suffered, with some miraculous exceptions, in reality as well as in appearance. Before the tribunal of the judge, amidst the shouts of the Coliseum, there was a certain feeling of enthusiasm that lent courage and determination to the Christian sufferer; but in the long and dreary hours of the darkened prison the mind floated over scenes of horror, of bloodshed and agony, that at each moment sent a thrill through the terrified feelings. Here they had time to think over the broken ties of home and friendship, voluntarily sacrificed for God, but still keenly felt in the affectionate heart. The fear of not persevering in their trial, the remorse, perhaps, for some past delinquencies and anxiety for dear ones to be abandoned to the storms of a cruel world, must all have lent their quota of anguish for the confessors in their prison.

The material privations and the awful character of the dungeon contributed not a little to the sufferings of its victims. Perpetual darkness and fetid air, the floor rough hewn in the rock, the martyr naked, and the cell horribly damp and cold, heavy chains to the hands and feet, and in hunger and thirst, these sufferings mingle with the happy memories of many a bright and shining soul amongst the martyred band of heaven, who on earth were condemned to the Mamertine.

We can get a glimpse of what it was in the days of its terrors from the writings of the ancients. Sallust, in his history of the conspiracy of Catiline, whose associates were strangled in this dungeon, thus writes: "There is a place in the prison which is called the Tullian, where you descend a little to the left about twenty feet below the surface of the earth. Immense walls fortify it on every side, and overhead it is closed by a vaulted roof of stone, but, with the awful darkness and fetid smell, the whole appearance of the place is terrible."\*

\* "Est locus in carcere quod Tullianum appellatur, ubi paullum descenderis ad laevam circiter viginti pedes humi depresso. Eum muniunt undique parietes atque insuper camera

Calpurnius Flaccus, in his beautiful but ill-expressed ideas, thus speaks of the Tullian: "I see the public prison constructed with immense boulders, with narrow, oblong apertures in the rock, not receiving a shadow of light. Here the condemned behold the Robur Tullianum, and, when they hear the grating of the iron trap-door, they faint with fear [exanimantur], and, obliged to look on the sad end of others, they learn what awaits themselves. The strokes of the scourge are heard from below, and the unwilling victims are rudely pushed by the soiled hands of the executioner. The jailer sits there with an inexorable feeling; his eyes are dry when the mother weeps; there dirt irritates the body, and chains press the tender hands."\*

We read in Livy the sentence pronounced by Scipio Asiatico on the younger Gracchus, when, at the head of a mob on the Aventine, if taken, he was to be cast like a thief and a robber into the stronghold, "that he might

lapideis fornicibus juncta, sed inculta tenebris et odore sœda  
atque terribilis ejus facies est."

\* In Declamat. et ad calcem Quintiliani. "Sonant verbera intus": Flaccus alludes to the custom of scourging criminals before putting them to death.

die in darkness, and then be cast, naked, before the prison.”\*

The titles given this prison by ancient historians conjure up horror. What an epitome of human woe rings through expressions like these: “Cell of groans!” “Abode of sorrow!” “Pluto’s Hospital amongst the living!” “A place darkened by perpetual night!” “A horrible and gloomy dungeon of fatal punishment,” and many others which we would find impossible to convey in English.† In the “Acts of SS. Chrysanthus and Daria,” as given in Surius on the 25th October: “He (Chrysanthus) is, therefore, cast into the Tullian, a prison most deep, frightful, and sordid; for there was there a lower prison, whence rose a horrible effluvia, for the filth of the houses was carried through it to the common sewer, . . . so dark that no ray of light ever penetrated to give the least sign of day.”‡

\* “Tenebris expiret et deinde nudus ante carcerem proiecitur.”—*Livy*, lib. 38.

† “Cella gemitum; Tristitiae domus; Apud superos Plutonis hospitium; Locus perpetua nocte cæcatus; Carcer ater, horribilis et funestæ poenalis loci; Antrum carcereum; Specus densæ caliginis; Domus feralis,” etc., etc.—*Cancellieri*, “Notizie del Carcere Tulliano,” page 6.

‡ “Conjectus est igitur in Carcerem Tullianum profundissimum, teterimum atque fœdissimum,” etc.



## CHAPTER II.

### PAGANS CONFINED IN THE MAMERTINE.

"Along the sacred way,  
Hither the triumph came, and, winding round,  
With acclamation and the martial clang  
Of instruments, and cars laden with spoil,  
Stopped at the sacred stair that then appeared,  
Then thro' the darkness broke ample starlight  
As though it led to heaven. 'Twas night, but now  
A thousand torches turning night to day  
Blazed, and the victor, springing from his seat,  
Went up, and, kneeling as in fervent prayer,  
Entered the Capitol. But what are they  
Who at the foot withdraw, a mournful train,  
In fetters? The Tullian's victims—the fallen,  
Those who were spared to grace the chariot-wheels.  
And there they parted where the road divides—  
The victor and the vanquished there withdraw—  
He to the festal board, and they to die."

ANONYMOUS.

### I.

**T**HE justice of God, that one day overtakes the impiety of the unbeliever as well as the Christian, has made use of the dungeons of the Mamertine.

tine to vindicate the outrages offered to the moral laws stamped on the human heart. Such an abode was well suited to receive the last blasphemies of wretches like Appius, Jurgurtha, Sejanus. There is a thrilling lesson to be drawn from this page of Roman history. The unchecked passion is more destructive than a raging fire: it is like an impetuous torrent that carries man in spite of himself to an ocean of ruin. Many a victim of blind ambition found his brilliant dream of wealth and power end in the horrible contrast of the Mamertine dungeon. Conquered kings, fallen favorites, and thwarted conspirators have here read the terrible lesson of the instability of human hope. We will glance at a few of the most remarkable names mentioned in Roman history, omitting those that we are not certain of, and briefly recording the events that led to their condemnation.

We believe the first on the list is Appius Claudius, the same who built the prisons now under the Church of St. Nicholas. Although he is supposed by some writers to have perished in his own prison, we will in this adopt the opinion of Baronius, and place the

scene of his suicide in the Mamertine. The prisons he built were intended for the plebeian class. In the confusion and uncertainty of dates we could prove his prisons were only commenced at the time of his death ; and lastly, as no ancient writer has distinctly stated he died in his own prison, we may safely cast this great tragedy of early history amongst the reminiscences of the Mamertine.

Appius was one of the ten tyrants who, about 300 before the Christian era, cast the gloomy shadow of his vices over the simple but warlike people of the city. After the murder of Dentatus, the greatest soldier of the army, he was guilty of a disgraceful domestic tragedy that has branded his name with disgust to every child that has read the history of those days.

One day, whilst sitting at his tribunal to dispense justice, he saw a maiden of exquisite beauty, aged about fifteen, passing to one of the public-schools, attended by a matron, her nurse. The charms of this damsel, heightened by all the innocence of virgin modesty, caught his attention and fired his heart. The day following she

passed ; he found her still more beautiful and his heart still more inflamed. Accustomed to yield to those inferior passions that vilify the rational being, he determined to possess himself of this innocent child, whose honor and virtue were to be sacrificed to his lust. Passion cares naught for right, for liberty or honor. The sighs of outraged innocence and the sacred claims of a father are feeble barriers to oppose this passion. The tyrant vainly tried to corrupt the fidelity of the nurse, and then had recourse to stratagem and deceit still more dishonorable. He selected from the companions of his debauchery a man named Marcus Cladius, whom he bribed to assert the beautiful girl was his slave, and to refer the cause to his tribunal for decision. Cladius behaved exactly according to his instructions. Entering the school where Virginia was playing with her companions, he seized upon her as his property, and was about to take her away by force, but was prevented by the people who were drawn together by her cries. After the first impulse of opposition, this lying instrument of tyrannical oppression explained to the people how the girl

was born from one of his slaves, and therefore his property, but he was willing to plead his cause before the tribunal of Appius, who was then administering justice (save the word!) in the Forum close by. They consented, and the weeping girl was led to the tribunal of Appius, who saw them approach from a distance, and was delighted that his impious plot had so far succeeded. In the meantime the crowd had increased; a murmur of pity passed along; indignation was swelling the heart of some brave youths, who were determined to see the end of this unblushing infraction of the rights of the citizens. They knew the child to be the offspring of the brave centurion Virginius, who was then on the battle-field defending his country, and that she was betrothed to a noble youth named Icilius, for whom they despatched a messenger in haste.

Arrived before Appius, Cladius pleaded his case. She was born of his slave, sold to the wife of Virginius, who was barren, and brought up as his child; that he had several witnesses, but that until he could gather them together it was but reasonable the slave should be delivered into his custody,

being her master. In deep cunning the impious judge pretended to be struck with the justice of his claims. He observed, if the reputed father himself were present, he might indeed be willing to delay the delivery of the maiden for some time, but in his absence he could not detain her from her proper master. He therefore adjudged her to Claudio as his slave until Virginius could prove his paternity; but Heaven will not permit such impiety to triumph—the sigh of injured innocence has ever been heard at the throne of God and found vindication.

The tyrant had scarcely finished his sentence when a bustle is heard at the door; the crowd make way; a well-known voice falls on the ears of Virginia, another moment, and she is clasped in the arms of Icilius. The lictors were ordered to separate the youthful pair and seize Icilius; they approached, but drawing his sword, for he, too, was a centurion, and with a voice that struck terror into the menials of the tyrant, he bade them stand back. "Appius," he cried, his eyes glistening with fury and his forehead wrinkled with a frown of defiance, "you must first pass over my corpse to seize Virginia. She

is espoused to me, and I will have her in her unsullied innocence. Whilst I live she will not leave the house of her father. If you have succeeded in usurping the rights of the tribunes and trampling on the liberties of the people, the curse of your lust shall not penetrate the sacred enclosure of our families to the insult of our wives and daughters. We will invoke the vengeance of the people and the army. Without passing a stream of blood, you will not execute the iniquitous sentence you have given."

Appius trembled on his throne; he heard the applause of the people; he saw the determination that fired every countenance; and, veiling his discomfiture, he calmly replied: "It is evident Icilius still breathes the sedition of the tribunes, and, under pretence of defending this slave, he wishes to excite the passions of the people. Not to supply cause for his seditious projects, I will not give any sentence to-day, but security must be given that the slave will be brought before me to-morrow."

The security was given, and the murmuring crowd parted, congratulating the weeping youths, and breathing vengeance on the

Decemvirate, whose days of tyranny would find a last and terrible sunset on the morrow.

In the meantime, couriers were sent with the fleetest horses to the camp to bring Virginius to Rome. The tyrant Appius had also sent despatches that Virginius should be detained, but his letters were intercepted; the brave centurion was already in full gallop towards his sorrowful home, and was soon in the embraces of his blooming child.

The next day—one of the most eventful in the history of Rome—Virginius, to the astonishment of Appius, appeared before the tribunal, leading his daughter by the hand, and both clothed in deep mourning. Claudius, the accuser, was also there, and began by making his demand. Virginius spoke in turn; he represented that his wife had several children; that she had suckled her children, as many could testify; moreover, if he had intentions of adopting a supposititious child, he would have selected a boy rather than a girl. It was surprising such a claim should be raised after fifteen years. The people gave from time to time unmistak-

able indications of their sympathy. The earnestness of the afflicted father had the eloquence of truth; and Appius, seeing the impression growing stronger, interrupted Virginus, and, in one of the most daring acts of injustice on record, once more adjudged the girl to Claudio.

A cry that would melt the heart of the greatest libertine burst from the poor girl; she threw herself on the neck of her father. Icilius was near. His hand was on his sword; he remembered his oath of the previous day, and the people, who knew the Forum was full of soldiers, trembled in suspense. At length Appius gave the lictors orders to clear the way and give the slave to her master; but, before Icilius could give vent to the passion that was burning in his heart like the interior of a volcano, Virginus, in a faltering voice, pretended to acquiesce to the sentence, and asked permission to take his farewell from one he had long considered his child and loved as such. Appius acceded on condition the interview should take place at once and in his presence. The hardy veteran, with a commotion that showed the poignant anguish

breaking his heart, took his almost expiring daughter in his arms, supporting her head on his breast, and wiping away the tears that rolled over her beautiful countenance. Unmindful of the crowd who wept around him, he gently made his way to one of the shops that surround the Forum. Suddenly seizing a large knife that lay on a block before a butcher's stall, he cried out, "Virginia, by this alone can I save thy honor and thy liberty!" and plunged the steel into her maiden heart. Drawing forth the blade reeking with her blood, he turned towards Appius, crying out with a loud voice, "Tyrant! by this blood of innocence I devote thy head to the infernal Furies!"

With knife in hand, foaming with fury, he ran through the city, wildly calling on the people to strike for freedom; thence he went to the camp, where, weeping and showing the knife stained with the guiltless blood of his murdered child, he roused the soldiers to fury and desire of revenge. The soldiers left the camp, abandoned their generals, and came to Rome to be avenged of their tyrants. They took possession of the Aventine. The people in the city, in the

meantime, led on by Icilius, were preparing a dreadful attack on the few wretches that still guarded the tyrant Appius. For several days he lay secreted. At length the soldiers, gaining from the Senate the change of government, banished all the Decemvirs except Appius and Opis, whom they cast into the dungeons of the Mamertine until they would determine the death they would give them. But they both strangled themselves in their prison before they could be torn to pieces by the fury of the mob.

Cicero must have had this fact before him when he wrote: "The uncontrolled desire is a burning fire; it not only destroys particular persons, but entire families, and ruins the whole commonwealth. From desires spring hatred, dissension, discord, seditions, and bloody wars."\*

## II.

THE Samnites were once the bravest and most formidable enemies of the commonwealth of Rome. They several times defeated the Roman armies, but always treated

\* Cicero de Finibus.

their victims with mercy. On one occasion their brave General Pontius surrounded the whole army in the defiles of the mountains near Capua. Without shedding a drop of blood, having obliged them only to pass under the yoke and pay a fine, he sent them back to Rome. Twice was the Roman army at his mercy; but the indomitable spirit of the Romans never gave in. In the course of time they regained their former power and took this same General Pontius prisoner. Fabius, who triumphed on this occasion, had him put to death in the Mamertine. "Whilst he was borne along in his chariot," says Arnold,\* "according to custom, his old father rode behind him as one of his lieutenants, delighting himself with the honors of his son. But the moment when the consul and his father, having arrived at the end of the sacred way, turned to the left to ascend the hill of the Capitol, C. Pontius, with the other prisoners of rank who thus far followed the procession, were led aside to the right hand to the prison beneath the Capitoline Hill, and there were

\* "Rome," vol. ii., page 33.

thrust down into the underground dungeon of the prison and beheaded. One year had passed since his last battle, nearly thirty since he had spared the lives and liberty of two Roman armies, and, unprovoked by the treachery of his enemies, had afterwards set at liberty the generals who were given up into his power as a pretended expiation of their country's perfidy. Such a murder, committed or sanctioned by such a man as Fabius, is peculiarly a national crime, and proves too clearly that in their dealings with foreigners the Romans had neither magnanimity nor justice."

### III.

THE last of the Macedonian kings, who bore in his veins the noble blood but not the great spirit of Philip, poured forth with his last sigh in the Mamertine the fulfilment of the prophecy of Daniel. Perseus, a weak and effeminate prince, was the last of the Grecian rule that dared resist the invincible legions of the iron empire. He was beaten in a pitched battle by the Consul Æmilius

near Enipeus. He attempted to procure safety by flying into Crete, but, being abandoned by all, surrendered himself to the conqueror, who brought him to Rome to grace his splendid triumph. When the gorgeous procession arrived at the foot of the Capitol, amidst the deafening shouts of the delighted people, congratulating their victorious general and heaping insult on the fallen king, he was led, as usual, to the Tullian keep. After this the warlike state of Macedon, whose king once sighed there were no more worlds to conquer, never stood in the battle-field again, for Greece became the luxurious and civilized garden of the empire.

#### IV.

JUGURTHA may be said to be, perhaps, one of the most remarkable of the pagan victims of this horrible prison. His miserable end is another proof that even in this world there is a providence that pursues the evil-doer; there are few instances in the annals of the world's crime where murderers have not

received some of their punishment this side the grave.

He was the nephew of the King Micipsa of Numidia, who at death left him in charge of his two sons, Aderbal and Jempsal. In ambition to seize the supreme power for himself he murdered, in cold blood, the eldest, Aderbal, and attempted the same on the youngest, but he escaped, for a while only, the machinations of Jugurtha, and appealed to the Romans for protection. Whereupon Jugurtha, being sensible how much avarice and injustice had crept into the Senate, sent his ambassadors with large presents to Rome, who so successfully prevailed that the Senate decreed him half the kingdom which he had thus acquired by murder and usurpation. The commissioners sent to divide the kingdom between him and Aderbal were ten in number; amongst them was Opimius, the murderer of Caius Gracchus, a man of venal character; they accepted still further bribes from Jugurtha to give him the richest and most populous part of the kingdom, which at best was but a temporary provision on the part of Jugurtha, for he determined to seize on the whole

kingdom. It was he that said, on this occasion, that Rome was so mercenary that she would sell herself to any one who was rich enough to buy her. The same was afterwards said in the days of the degenerate successors of the Cæsars. How strange the nineteenth century has looked down on the disgraceful fact that some of the venal and ungrateful children of the same city *have sold her and her king* to a stranger and a usurper!

Jugurtha soon threw off the mask of his ambition, and, besieging Aderbal in his capital, Cirta, at length got him in his power and murdered him. The Romans, who had still some sentiments of justice and generosity, complained of this treachery, and procured a decree from the Senate that he should be summoned before them. The Cimbrian usurper made no difficulty in throwing himself on the clemency of the Senate, whom he hoped once more to bribe; but failing in this, and giving no satisfaction for his conduct, he was ordered to leave the city. Albanus, the consul, was sent with an army to follow him, who, giving the command to Aulus, his brother, a person in

every way unqualified for the task, the Romans were beaten in several battles, and on one occasion the army, to be saved from being cut to pieces, surrendered and had to pass under the yoke—the greatest disgrace known in the military parlance of those days.

In this condition Metellus, the succeeding consul, found affairs upon his arrival in Numidia: officers without confidence, an army without discipline, and an enemy ever watchful and intriguing. However, by skill, by a rocklike integrity and attention to the reformation of the forces, he soon regained the power of Rome. In the space of two years Jugurtha was defeated in several battles, forced out of his own dominions, and constrained to seek for peace. Thus all promised an easy victory for Metellus, but he was frustrated by the intrigues of Marius, his lieutenant, who came to reap the harvest of glory which the other had sown. He got himself elected consul, and, returning to Africa, pursued the war with greater vigor and even with greater skill than Metellus. Jugurtha found a powerful ally in Bocchus, the king of Mauritania, but Marius finally

proved the superior force of the Roman arms by slaying 90,000 of the Africans in one engagement. Bocchus did not wish to hazard his own crown for the protection of his ally, and implored peace from the Senate. He was given to understand the delivering up of Jugurtha to the Romans would conciliate their favor and pardon.

Accordingly Jugurtha was drawn into an ambuscade by the treachery of Bocchus. He was made a prisoner, loaded with chains, and brought to Rome to grace the triumph of Marius. When the triumphal procession arrived at the foot of the Capitol, the wretched captives were led aside to the Mamertine. Plutarch describes a sad scene that took place when this fallen general had entered the prison. Some violently tore his garments, others, while contending for his ear-rings, cut off one of his ears, and, casting him naked into the gloomy Barathrum, filled with horror, "By Hercules," he cried, "how cold is your bath!" They left him for six days sinking with hunger; and, hoping up to the last moment to receive a

reprieve, he ended his life in the merited retribution of his cruelties.\*

## V.

HERE also ended their days Lentulus, Cethegus, and Cæsius, who were leading members in the conspiracy of Catiline.

Catiline was a patrician, but being a designing man who wished to aggrandize his sinking fortunes on the ruin of others, and in unbridled ambition aimed at the supreme power. He assembled about thirty of his associates and informed them of his aims, his hopes, and settled plans. It was resolved amongst them that a general insurrection should be raised throughout Italy, the different parts of which were assigned to different leaders. Rome was to be fired in different places at once, and Catiline, at

\* “Cui post triumphum in carcerem dejecto, quidam vestimentum violenter laceraverunt, alii vero dum inaures ei auferre decertarunt. Detrusus autem nudus in Barathrum perturbatione plenus, obtrectans, ‘Heracleus,’ inquit, ‘quam frigidum vestrum est balneum!’ Sed hunc sex dies colluctantem cum fame et usque ad ultimam horam desiderio vitæ suspensum condigna pœna suis crudelitatibus consecit.”—*Plutarch in “Mario,” page 412.*

the head of an army raised in Etruria, was, in the general confusion, to possess himself of the city and massacre all the senators. Lentulus, who was one of his profligate assistants, who had been prætor or judge in the city, was to preside in their general councils. Cethagus, a man who sacrificed great power in the hope of gratifying his revenge against Cicero, was to direct the massacre through the city ; and Cæsius was to direct those who fired it. The vigilance of Cicero being a great obstacle to their designs, Catiline was desirous to see him taken off before he left Rome, upon which two knights of the company undertook to kill him the next morning in his bed, in an early visit on pretence of business. But the meeting was no sooner over than Cicero was informed of all that passed in it, for by the intrigues of a woman named Fulvia he had gained over Curius, her lover, and one of the conspirators, to send him a punctual account of all their deliberations. His morning visitors were punctual to their appointment, but found Cicero prepared. Having taken precautions to protect the city, he assembled the Senate to deliberate on their

further movements. Catiline went boldly to the Senate to declare his innocence, but, confronted with the eloquence of Cicero, he hastily withdrew, declaring aloud that, since he was denied a vindication of himself, and driven headlong by his enemies, he would extinguish the flames that were raised around him in universal ruin. After a short conference with Lentulus and Cethegus, he left Rome by night with a small retinue to make the best of his way to Etruria, where Marius, one of the conspirators, was raising an army to support him.

In the meantime Cicero had those who remained in Rome seized, and Lentulus and Cethegus were cast, with their associates, into the Mamertine, where they were strangled after a few days by the executioner. They show in the prison some iron hooks, fastened to the peperino blocks, to which the strangling-cords were attached. Catiline himself was not killed in the Mamertine; he fell on the field of battle after a desperate fight. His small army of twelve thousand men fought to the last man, and fell, as Sallust remarks, with their face to the enemy and on the spot where they com-

menced to resist. Catiline himself was found “longe a suis,” still breathing, in the midst of a circle of slain whom he had hewn down in his last desperate struggle. “What a beautiful death,” Florus adds, “were it in the defence of his country!”

The names of those who suffered with Lentulus we have from the following passage of Sallust: “After Lentulus was cast into the Tullian, the judges of capital crimes to whom he was commissioned had his neck broken with a rope (*laqueo gulam fregerunt*). Thus, too, Patricius, of the illustrious family of the Cornelii, who had borne the consular dignity, and a man of worthy morals and deeds, found his end. Of Cethegus, Statilius, Gabinius, Cæparius, we have to record the same sad fate.”\*

## VI.

PLEMINIUS was another political firebrand confined in the Mamertine. Livy (Fourth Decad., fourth book) tells us that whilst in prison—one of the upper chambers of the

\* Catiline, c. lvi.

Mamertine—he planned his escape with cruel cunning. His partisans were to fire the city in several places at the same time, and in the confusion to break into the prison and free him. The conspiracy eked out before put into execution, and Pleminius was cast into the lower dungeon by order of the Senate and strangled.

## VII.

THE birds in the tropics that kill snakes lift them in their talons in the air and then let them fall; the greater the snake the higher they bring it. How like the treatment the cruel and fickle goddess called by the pagans Fortune gives her votaries! She raises men at times to the summit of her slippery globe, and then, hurling them down, laughs at their fall. In her hands was a wretch from the court of Tiberius, who ended his days in giving the Mamertine its due; they called him Sejanus.

The imbecile and profligate Tiberius retired into voluptuous solitude, the better to indulge his abominable passions, leaving this monster, the nearest thing to the reflection of himself in the debauchery and bloodshed of the capital, to rule and sport with the

lives and property of his subjects during his absence. The historian Tacitus seems to want words to tell the horrors of this tyrant's career. "So direful," he writes, in the 70th chapter of his Annals, "was this reign of terror, that all social intercourse, convivial meetings, conversations, and even the interchange of common civilities between the nearest kindred and friends were interrupted; consternation and reciprocal distrust having so seized on men's souls that the stoutest spoke in whispers, looking round them tremblingly, as if the very statues or mosaics could betray them.\* From wherever the frown of Sejanus fell all fled as from a devoted spot; whomsoever he hinted or glared at in anger was shunned and forsaken, as if devoted to the infernal gods. No day passed without its bloody tragedy, nor was any moment or place respected by the ministers of his tyranny; the very sanctuaries, where men were wreathed for sacrifice, where no loud word should be heard, were profaned by the blood shed in his anger and the cries of his victims."\*\*

But the hour of his downfall arrived. He

\* "Etiam muta atque inania tectum et parietes circumspetabantur."

was accused of treason to Tiberius, for in his pride he resolved to be emperor himself. He was dragged to the Mamertine amidst the execrations and groans of the people, and there strangled by order of the Senate. His body was cast naked on the Gemonial stairs, and then flung with ignominy into the Tiber.†

### VIII.

In Josephus we read (book 8, and chap. 5) that Titus, the scourge of the Jewish people, graced his splendid triumph with 100,000 of that fallen race, and Simon, the son of Giora, was led in chains by his triumphal car, and then “to the fate due to the conquered,” as Cicero held, scourged, starved, and strangled in the Tullian.

There were others of less note, of whom we have no interesting particulars. Such were Syphax, King of Numidia, condemned in the triumph of Scipio Africanus; Bituitus, King of Avernus, the associates of Gracchus junior, Vercingetorix, the Gaulish leader, and victim of the triumph of Julius Cæsar. It is

\* “ Ubi inter sacra et vota, quo tempore verbis etiam profanis abstineri mos esset vincla et laqueus inducantur.”

† Dion. lib. 58.

asserted by some historians that Perseus, Syphax, and Bituitus, although condemned to the prison, were afterwards reprieved and saved.

The last of the political prisoners of whom we have any record was Doryphorianus, of whom Ammianus Marcellinus (book 28, chap. 1), relating the events of the year 368 of the vulgar era, states he was condemned to death and cast into the Tullian, but was taken thence by the advice of the emperor's mother, probably on account of its sacred character, because it was before this time consecrated by Pope Sylvester to the service of God. Doryphorianus was then put to death by various torments outside of Rome.\*

We now come to treat of the Mamertine in its Christian history—a field full of flowers so beautiful we hardly know which to cull first. We will endeavor to follow events in their chronological order. With a brief outline of the first persecution we will lead to the vicissitudes, or rather the arrangements, of Divine Providence that led the first Christian victims to the Mamertine.

\* “Et Doryphorianum pronuntiatum capitis reum trusumque carcere Tulliano matris consilii princeps exinde rapuit, rever sumque ad lares per cruciatus oppressit immensos.”



## CHAPTER III.

### THE FIRST PERSECUTION.

#### I.

**N**E year after the Ascension of our Blessed Lord a strange scene took place on the Pons Sublicius\* at Rome. It was the vigil of the Feast of the Annunciation. Although Christianity was scarcely yet heard of in the great city, its secret, irresistible power had sent before it the first ripples of a mighty wave that was one day to sweep over the world, and they were strangely felt at Rome.

On the bridge there is gathered a troop of soldiers and a crowd of people. Amidst the confusion of voices, the screams of women and children, and the rough orders of the leaders, the soldiers are binding some aged men and casting them into the Tiber. They are

\* Now called Ponte Rotto.

senators. They have conspired, perhaps, against the life of the emperor; they had incurred, perhaps, the displeasure of the tyrant, who, on the same bridge but a few weeks before, crucified the priests of the temple of Isis for interfering with his paramour. No less than the greatest crimes could draw such a terrible death on the venerable fathers of the country. It was not so. Their awful fate was strongly wrapt up in the realization of prophecies they knew not; they denied the divinity of Jesus Christ, and were flung into the Tiber by the orders of Tiberius. Christian reader, bear with us for a moment. We will interest you with a strange tradition, that has floated down to us from the first days of the Church.

Tiberius was a tyrant. Morose, melancholy, vindictive, an unguarded word or an incautious look might be sufficient cause for death in those days when the greatest wretches were permitted to wield the most absolute power. It is said this tyrant was affected with a loathsome leprosy, which had already consumed his extremities, disfiguring his hands and feet; hence, he sought lonely places, abandoned the court to pampered

menials, and buried himself in the seclusion of Caprera and Misenum.

About the eighteenth year of his reign, he heard of the wonderful works of our Jesus of Nazareth. The fame of the amiable Prophet of Galilee had floated on a thousand zephyrs with the consolations he spread in his track —giving light to the sightless eye, power to the paralyzed limb, and joy poured into desolate homes by departed spirits called back to life; demons banished and forbidden to molest the children of men; cures, blessings, and peace distributed to all who came under the beam of his smile, marvellously and instantaneously.

Hope cheered the emperor's heart, and ambassadors were despatched immediately to Judea to bring the Great Prophet to his imperial presence. They arrived in Jerusalem; but late; Calvary had witnessed the Deicide; and the clouds of heaven had already shrouded him from his weeping people, who had seen the Word Incarnate float away from Olivet into the realms of peace. During their stay they saw the impress of his venerable features on the towel of Veronica. They wished to bring the extraordinary

relic to their master, but more precious than gold was the treasure of the pious matron. Through force and fear she was obliged to accompany the ambassadors to Rome, bringing her treasure in a double case.\*

Veronica was presented to Tiberius, who took into his hands the touching, sorrowful image of the Man of Sorrows. In deep silence he gazed on the divine countenance; shadows of sympathy passed over the iron features of the emperor. There, were the bloody stains and the cruel, thorny crown, the weeping eyes, the calm expression of resignation, and the ineffable sweetness that made Jesus so loved. With a suppressed sigh he handed the holy face to the kneeling Veronica; he bade her keep her treasure, and assigned her a pension for life.†

A few days after this event, Tiberius summoned the Senate to meet him in the Forum. Six hundred of the learned and wealthy men

\* One of the cases in which Veronica placed the holy towel is still preserved, and was lately amongst the relics of the Pantheon at Rome.

† Piazza, "Emerologio Sacro," page 190. It is also said by some that Tiberius was cured on this occasion, but the assertion does not seem to have sufficient authenticity. The Holy Face or Towel of Veronica is still preserved in St. Peter's in Rome.

of the empire poured in from their marble palaces in the city or from their elysian villas on the Sabine or Alba Longa hills—men whose brows were whitened with the snows of many winters, who had learned the art of war and passed through the hardships of campaign, whose ancestors were heroes placed amongst the minor gods of the empire; who had passed through the stormy days of the triumvirate, heard the eloquence of Cicero, and had seen the blood of Cæsar flow under the statue of Pompey. The citation of the Senate was always an important event, but more so when the emperor himself announced his intention to meet the conscript fathers in council. Innumerable conjectures were afloat why the emperor, contrary to his usual retirement, came forth again from his privacy in his old age to meet the Senate in person in the arena of politics. None but God and his blessed spirits knew what was coming; he permitted it in his providence.

The appointed morning arrived. Tiberius stood before the august assembly; he unrolls a gilded parchment, and reads: THE PASSION OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST!

You start! It was not the sublime inspirations left us by Matthew or John: it was the crucifixion and death, the resurrection and miracles of Jesus of Nazareth, as were recorded by Pontius Pilate, his Procurator at Judea. Tiberius asked the Senate to place him amongst their gods, for, according to an old law of the empire, they alone had the power of conferring divine honors on the dead.

We tremble in awe in contemplating the mysterious forbearance of the eternal Son of the eternal God, who allows his creatures to class him with the impure and ridiculous fabrications that constituted the gods of paganism; but he is a patient God, who at times reserves his own terrible vindication for the days and regions beyond the tomb.

We may not tarry over the absurdities or blasphemies that even great men speak when blinded with prejudice. The Senate almost unanimously rejected the divinity of Jesus of Nazareth; but those who had the hardihood to speak out their minds against the wish of the emperor were the next day precipitated from the parapets of the Sublician Bridge, and found their graves in the muddy bed of the Tiber.

The wretched emperor had not the courage to follow up his intention of honoring the Galilean God. He retired sullenly to Misenum, and was shortly afterwards smothered between two beds by orders of Caligula.

The reasons given by the Senate for not accepting the divinity of Jesus Christ have been preserved for us by several historians, and are in keeping with the pride that made them fancy they could make gods.

1. They would not recognize him as a god, for some of the subjects of the empire had dared to invoke him without their permission.

2. He was a divinity that wished to be alone, and would not keep fellowship with their gods.

3. It was unbecoming the dignity of that august assembly to recognize as a god a man who was put to death as a malefactor in one of the provinces.

It is said history repeats itself. There is a striking analogy in the decision of the Roman Senate and the decisions of some of the modern parliaments of Europe. It has been asked in the Senates of London, Berlin, and Turin, Will we accept the law of this God as

our rule and guidance? The answer is No! with a large majority. And why?

1. Because his followers appoint their bishops and preach his doctrines without asking our permission.

2. He is a jealous God, and will not allow his followers to have fellowship with those who deny his divinity or mutilate his doctrine.

3. His law is one of suffering, humiliation, and penance. These do not become rich and powerful men!

Were we to anticipate a page of history, we would record a scene of desolation and woe often enacted in the vicissitudes of the past. Without the aid of prophetic vision we can transfer to the canvas of time pictures of ruin wrapped up in the clouds of the future.

Once there was a chosen spot on the banks of the Tiber where Fortune alighted from her slippery globe; wealth, power, and magnificence gilded the shrine of her temporary abode; the laws of its capitol and senate thundered with terror to distant nations; in the pride of power, in the voluntary blindness of idolatry, they ignored the true God. The breath of his indignation swept over the city, and ruin crumbled on ruin tells us that

there a nation once existed that dared to meditate vain things against the Omnipotent. Broken columns, fragments of mosaic pavement; the supports of a portico encrusted with marble, or the apsis of a temple covered with gold, tells passing generations where once assembled the haughty Senate of the empress city.

To-day laborers are employed to remove the soil that has accumulated twenty feet deep and lain for centuries over the spot where the Senate refused to accept Jesus of Nazareth as their God.\*

We have heard of fabulous islands that have sometimes appeared on the blue rim of the ocean in the track the mariner has passed; thus nations that opposed the decrees of Providence appear in the past as if they never had been—the few mouldering evidences of their fall, like lurid clouds that hang around the setting sun when the storm has ceased, haunt the memory with the violence and intensity of their ruin.

The Church they persecuted, still young in the eternal youth of her Founder, smiling in

\* A.D. 1874.

the confidence of her triumph, is still buffeted by the shock of angry billows ever rolling through the restless ocean of time; still suffering the persecution of the worthless offspring of forgotten generations, who like their fathers refuse to learn the lesson thundered from the history of centuries.

## II.

AMONGST the chastisements that have fallen heavy on man there are few greater than the protracted reign of tyrants. When these wretches have been hurled from their thrones and flung into dishonored graves by the sedition of an outraged nation, loud and long rises the grateful shout to heaven from the liberated victims of oppression. "The tyrant is dead!" rings from city to hamlet, and seeks with joyful echo the trembling refugee in seclusion and exile. But when death does not stay the power to do evil, when from their tombs they are still permitted to molest the human race, we behold in their existence a curse like that of the demon permitted by an angry God for the punishment of man. History gives us a thrilling instance.

Long before Michael Angelo designed the superb entrance into Rome by the Flaminian Gate, long before the lovely parterres and artistic terraces of the Pincian replaced a grass-covered hill where children played and lambkins gambolled, and instead of broad avenues the hill was ascended by a foot-path, there was on the left of the ancient gate a large nut-tree, which stood in the midst of an enclosure held in horror by the people. At night the deserted plain rang with unearthly sounds, and horrible phantoms revelled around the solitary tree; the spirits assumed the most hideous forms, and especially like large, ugly ravens that spoke with a human voice. For centuries this haunted spot was the terror of the people. Many a thrilling, hair-standing tale was handed down from fathers to their children, and told around the firesides of the Roman people, of ghosts and frightful apparitions that infested the enclosure of the cursed nut-tree. Even corporal injuries were inflicted on those who, through curiosity or bravery, attempted to enter. Things were thus until Pope Paschal II., in the year 1099, believing much of the horrors of the place sprang from excited imagination

or fancy, levelled the enclosure, and reduced it to the same appearance as the plain around. But the annoyance became worse. It would seem the spirits of evil rejoiced in a larger field of operation, and laughed at the Pope who thought to banish them. The holy Pope was surprised and puzzled. He fasted, and prayed that God would make known to him the cause of this strange annoyance. At length God vouchsafed him a dream. He saw amidst a blue light, in the centre of the haunted spot, a number of devils dancing around an urn such as was used to contain the ashes of the dead in the time of the emperors. He immediately understood the cause of those nocturnal disturbances, and the next day, accompanied by some Roman clergy, proceeded with workmen to dig in the place intimated in his dream. Having sunk a few feet, they arrived at the columbarium of an old tomb; they broke away the walls, and found in the midst of the rubbish a large porphyry urn, bearing on it in bold characters the following inscription : \*

\* Martinelli, *Roma Ricercata in suo Situ*; also Gruter, page 237, No. 3.

OSSA

NERONIS CÆSARIS

GERMANICI CÆS. F.

DIVI AUGUSTI PRONEP.

FLAVII AUGUSTALIS QUÆSTORIS.

The groan that greeted this discovery passed through the city; thousands flocked around to see the hated relic. With ropes and sticks, each fearing to touch it, amidst a crowd, fortifying themselves with the sign of the cross, they dragged the accursed urn towards the Tiber. On the banks it broke to fragments, and the ashes were scattered on the muddy waters, to be carried to the ocean, where the demons that protected them might haunt the wild waste of waters away from the abodes of men. The city, at last was freed from the curse, and on the spot, so terrible, so feared by the passing generations, the sainted Pope, erected a magnificent shrine, which he dedicated to the *People's Virgin*—a happy change, attracting love and veneration to that which was the people's horror.\*

\* The church received the title of *Madonna del Popolo*, because built by subscriptions of the people. This strange origin of this beautiful church is given on a slab of marble in the choir behind the altar. It runs thus:

Behold the ashes and the accompanying spirit of the first persecutor of Christianity—the tyrant who, four years after the Senate refused to acknowledge the divinity of Jesus of Nazareth, stepped over the corpse of his mother's victim to seize the reins of empire and drive it to a slaughter-house of woe. Yet, on his accession, hope gave a deceitful smile; the world thought it had reason to rejoice. Young, in the bloom of manhood and the promise of virtue, he was hailed to the throne by the acclamations of a people who soon learned to rue their choice. Ere the pride of power and the indulgence of

ALTARE A PASCHALI PAPA II.  
DIVINO AFFLATU  
RITU SOLEMNI HOC LOCO ERECTUM  
QUO DEMONES  
PROCRE NUCIS ARBORI INSIDENTES  
TRANSEUNTEM HINC POPULUM DIVE INFESTANTES  
CONFESTIM EXPULIT.  
URBANI VIII. PONT. MAX. AUCTORITATE  
EXCELSICREM IN LOCUM QUEM CONSPICIS  
TRANSLATUM FUIT  
ANNO DOM. M.DCXXXII. DIE VI M.

This fact is also mentioned by Panciroli, Piazza, Martinelli, Marangoni, Jacopi, Baronius, and a host of others. The writer in Murray's Guide mentions it (page 162), but it is amusing to notice how other Protestant writers fumble over it. Augustus Hare ("Walks in Rome") says some crows used to light on the nut-tree, and Paschal II. dreamt they were demons!

passion had blasted the impress of nature on a generous spirit, pity reigned in the heart of Nero. When called to sign his first death-warrant, he cried out: "Would I had never learned to write!"

Oft has the bright morning seen a tempestuous evening. Oft has the noblest youth ended in the deepest depravity. There are parts of the world where the land is lower than the sea, and the mighty element breaks through its boundaries and sweeps over the cultivated lands, bearing desolation and woe; but so deep, so terrible was the sea of impiety that burst over the youth and virtue of this emperor that one historian tells us he was sent on the world to show us how much iniquity could exist in one man! Everything cruel, revolting, and wicked found in the after-history of the world is supposed to be described in the superlative when compared to its prototype in Nero.

Once in the tender compassion of youth that shuddered at the thought of bloodshed, he sighed over the merited death of a fellow-creature; the same man afterward, in an unparalleled longing for blood, sighed that the Roman people had not but

one head that he might slay them all at once.

There are few so depraved not to yield to even one noble sentiment of nature; not to recognize some stray feeling of affection for an aged mother or kind sister. Few have been the tyrants, the monsters, who could look without a shudder on the tender frame of girlhood writhing in agony in a pool of blood, and fewer still who have seen live victims cast into a burning furnace and call with brutal joy for a repetition of these thrilling horrors; yet deeper in infamy and more revolting in cruelty—as though he were the centre of a host of demons of cruelty—was the person of this demon, who was permitted by Providence to be not only the persecutor of his Church, but the scourge of the human race.

Nero commenced his bloodthirsty career by the murder of Britannicus, whose right to the throne was his only crime. It happened during the Saturnalia, when all distinctions are levelled, it fell to Nero, as they were playing forfeits after supper, to award the various modes of ransom. Accordingly, he enjoined to each of

the others some pleasantry, but nothing humiliating, until it came to the turn of Britannicus. The young prince was rudely ordered to rise from his couch and to recite some verses, standing in the middle of the banquet-hall, for his persecutor thus hoped to exhibit him as a blockhead, to the jeers and derision of the revellers. But, unabashed by his position, the royal youth commenced, in a clear and steady voice, to recite some verses about one who, in his boyhood, was pushed from his throne and degraded to the rank of a poor subject. The allegory could not be mistaken, and the sympathy for the prince excited in the hearers was enough to rouse the suspicions of the tyrant, and this they give (Tacitus) as the first cause that made him resolve on commencing at once his long-premeditated career of bloodshed.

A few days after a dose of poison was administered to Britannicus. In the midst of the triclinium and before the assembled guests the fatal draught was given. The cup-bearer, who, according to prescriptive rite, was to taste beforehand whatever beverage he presented, having been apprised beforehand, contrived to manage his office so

adroitly as to receive no injury ; but Britanicus, finding the draught cooling, emptied his glass with thirsting eagerness ; so instantaneous did the fatal virus do its work, that, in one agonizing but abortive effort to cry for help, he gasped, quivered in every limb of his fair frame, and fell dead.

The courtiers and attendants are thrown into consternation ; the old familiars, long initiated into the intrigues of the court and aware of the plot, show no signs of surprise ; nor did the heartless Nero move a muscle ; with an inhuman smile he remarked it was but one of the prince's epileptic fits ; he would be better when brought to the air. Agrippina, his mother, was present ; a sudden terror, that flashed from under the cool serenity beneath which she had long learned to entomb her most hideous passions, betrayed that she was as ignorant of the affair as poor Octavia, the prince's sister, from whose virgin cheek the hue of candor had been blasted by that atmosphere of dissimulation and enormity of the court, which had rotted every feeling of tenderness and sisterly affection in her dreary heart. After a moment's pause the mirth and gayety of the banquet was re-

sumed, and, waxed louder and more boisterous.

The fire that consumed the corpse of Britannicus glared out upon the dark hour of his murder; for, while this poor victim was being escorted to the triclinium and attended at the banquet with obsequious ceremonial, they were constructing his funeral pile and mustering the satellites who were to transport his injured ashes to the tomb. However, they were to repose amongst the urns of his mighty ancestors on the Campus Martius, and such torrents of rain fell during the hurried and truncated rites that the populace took it for a sign of divine indignation.\*

“Abyssus abyssum invocat.” You have heard, perhaps, the loud echo of cannon rolling through the ravines of mountains, leaping from crag to crag, and seeming to increase like thunder from each concussion. Thus the unchained passions of Nero rushed on to greater excesses: his own mother is his next victim.

In doubt whether the cup, the dagger, or the firebrand should be the instrument of his hate, he consulted Anicetus, the com-

\* “Rome as She Was,” vol. i,

mander of the fleet at Misenum, whose heart was as dark as the tyrant who gave him power. Having been a slave, he had some old accounts to settle with his imperial mistress, and the prospect of revenge made him a ready counsellor. “A state galley,” he said, “could be so constructed as to go to pieces at a given signal; the sea is the native element of accidents, and where is the traitor that shall dare harbor a suspicion against Cæsar whilst the winds and waves can be impeached? Temples and votive altars to the deceased empress will not only stifle any sinister report, but add to the other imperial titles that of filial piety.” \*

The ingenious villany caught the matricide’s fancy. The time, too, was propitious, for Nero was then engaged in celebrating the four-year games at Baiæ. Agrippina was absent from the court through some pique, and they determined to bring her back. The tyrant feigned repentance: the sacrifice which a son is bound to make to soothe

\* “Nihil tam capax fortuitorum quam mare, et, si naufragio intercepta sit, quem, adeo iniquum, ut sceleri assignet quod venti et fluctus deliquerint? Additum principem defunctæ templum et aras et cætera ostentandæ pietati. Placuit sollertia,” etc.—*Tacitus*, lib. xiv. 3.

the displeasure and the momentary impulses of anger, and other duteous and amiable reflections, were got up to pretend the repentance of the refractory son. Agrippina was once more invited to the imperial cortége; in that passion for sights and pageantry so natural in the sex the decoy succeeded, and she was allured to her fate. With the well-feigned impatience of filial fondness Nero expected her arrival on the shore at Cuma, and when they met the tenderness of his embrace and the warm pressure of his hand convinced the unhappy mother that, after all, he loved her. Could guilt be greater than this matricidal hypocrisy?

From Cuma the joyful party proceeded to the imperial villa at the other verge of the neck of land (*ad Baulos*) looking out over the Bay of Naples; but it had been preconcerted that the imperial banquet should take place in the palace at Baiæ, that the deed of murder might be accomplished under the cloak of darkness, when she would be returning to her own villa on the Lucrine Lake. One stately barge looked more gay than the rest in its gala decorations, and seemed to invite the empress, who was fond of

being rowed in a gallant style, to step on board.

The hour of separation came; but Nero was not satisfied with embracing his mother once, but he flies after her through the brilliant saloons and corridors to repeat his adieu; he seems to cling to her bosom, and can hardly tear himself away—whether it was that these were the finishing strokes of a master in the arts of dissimulation or that the last sight of her who bore him, as she was on her way to death, exercised some mysterious influence even over his savage nature.\*

The heavens shone with the placid lustre of the stars that were reflected in the tranquil deep; all nature was at peace, and it would seem the gods had ordered everything to discountenance and expose the plot. Agrippina was accompanied by only two of her own attendants. Caprereius Gallus

\* “Nam pluribus sermonibus, modo familiaritate juvenili, Nero, et rursus adductus, quasi seria consociaret, tracto in longum convictu, prosequitur abeuntem arctius oculis et pectori hærens, sive explenda simulatione seu perituræ matris supremus adspectus quamvis ferum animum retinebat.”—*Tacitus*, lib. xiv. 4.

† “Noctem sideribus illustrem et placido mari quietam quasi convincendum ad scelus dii præbuêre.”—*Ib.* cap. 5.

stood in waiting near the stern, and at the feet of her imperial mistress, reclining under a stately canopy, sat Acerronia, prattling with all the delight imaginable about the emperor's change, ascendancy at court regained, when, at the appointed signal, down comes the deck, overlaid with an immense weight of lead, and Caprereius is instantly crushed to death. Agrippina and her attendant owed their lives to the accident by which the pillars of the canopy had been left of sufficient strength not to give way under the crash; nor did the barge, as was intended, go to pieces; the crew having fallen into such confusion that the efforts of the accomplices were frustrated by the majority who were not privy to the design. There seemed nothing for it then but to overturn the boat by all running to one side; but, this extempore manœuvre being ill executed and some of the galliots running to the opposite side, the empress and her attendant were precipitated without violence into the water. The silly lady Acerronia was quickly despatched with oars or whatever came to hand, for, thinking to secure assistance, she kept crying "I am Agrippina! help, help the mother of

the emperor!" But Agrippina uttered not a word, thus fortuitously evading recognition. She got one wound on the shoulder. By swimming, however, and afterwards in a fishing-boat that picked her up, she made her way to the Lucrine Lake, and was carried to her own villa.

When she had leisure to reflect on the whole tissue of occurrences, the motive of so many flattering invitations to come down to Baiæ, of so many caresses and marks of honor heaped upon her, became too obvious. Shipwrecked! not by a gale or by striking on hidden rocks, but in smooth water, and the deck falling down like a portcullis! She weighed every incident connected with the death of Acerronia; absorbed in thought, she remembered the strange warning of the sibyl, and, looking on the blood trickling from her wound, she resolved to have revenge, but in order to circumvent the traitor she dissembled all suspicion of his treachery. Accordingly, she despatched her freedman Agerinus to apprise Nero that, through the benignity of the gods, she had escaped a serious accident, and begged he would not be alarmed about her safety.

In the meantime, the news of the failure reached Nero, and, worse still, that suspicion had begun to settle in the right quarter. He almost fell dead with fear, and, shaking from head to foot, began to swear that his mother would be swift as a tigress to revenge. "She'll arm the slaves, stir up the troops to mutiny; or, off to Rome with her tragic tale of shipwreck, her attendants massacred, her own wound, she'll so work on the Senate and the people! What shall become of me?" He summoned Burrus and Seneca in haste to advise something.

Their conference was short. Burrus assured the emperor there was not a man in the pretorian camp would undertake the murder of the daughter of Germanicus, whom they adored, and Seneca suggested that Anicetus should be made to complete the work he had undertaken and so egregiously failed in. Anicetus was ready, but wished to know how much he was to get. Nero, as if beside himself, protests that he will consider himself indebted to his faithful, trusty Anicetus for his empire, but to hasten and select men of despatch. At this moment, the messenger Agerinus from Agrippina was announced.

Nero, on the instant, and without a hint from any one, extemporizes another act of the tragedy. Dropping a stiletto between the freedman's feet while he is delivering his message, he cries out to the guards, ordering the wretch to be manacled, as if seized in an attempt on the prince's life—a villain sent by Agrippina, who, no doubt, would put an end to herself on learning the miscarriage of her treason.

Anicetus surrounded the villa with a strong guard, and, having battered in the gates, seized every domestic he met lest they should give the alarm. Arrived in the ante-chamber, he found a few officers of the household at their post, all the rest having fled on hearing the tumult in the outer courts. One solitary lamp cast a dim and melancholy gleam around the closet of Agrippina, and one solitary handmaid watched beside her bed. The moments of suspense lagged drearily, and each added to the load of anxiety that pressed heavily on her heart—no messenger from her son—no sign of Agerinus. Suddenly she heard heavy strokes, followed by a crash and tumult, confused at first and presently in the ante-room,

the sound of flying feet and harsh struggles against her very chamber door. As she turned to rebuke her handmaid gliding away, she saw Anicetus standing before her, followed immediately by Herculeus, captain of a three-benched galley, and a centurion of marines named Oloarites.

“If to enquire for my health, sir, say to your emperor that my wound is doing well. If bent on outrage, presume not to say that you have orders. I will not believe my son is a matricide.” But Herculeus and Oloarites were waiting the signal on either side of the couch. The galley captain struck first—a grievous stroke on the head with a club, and, while the centurion was brandishing his weapon, she raised her body, crying with her dying breath, “Ventreñ feri” (meaning that vengeance had lighted on the womb that had borne such a monster).\*

The next victim from his own household was the young and beautiful Octavia, whose sad fate may justly cause a sigh.

\* All the above facts of Britannicus and Agrippina are taken from a free translation of Tacitus, and are quoted from “Rome under Paganism and the Popes.”

We will not tarry over the harrowing particulars of her sad death. The thrilling tale may be told in a few words. She was betrothed to Nero, but not his spouse. He wished to get rid of her to marry the infamous Poppea; “a lady,” says Tacitus, “adorned with every charm except virtue.” \*

Once more he procured the assistance of the vile Anicetus, who swore he was a paramour of the innocent Octavia. It was enough; her doom was sealed. She was yet in her “teens” (about eighteen at the time of her death), but had seen many a dark hour of grief. In crossing the bridal threshold of the imperial palace she entered a house of mourning. Her father, Claudius, was swept away by poison, then her brother Britannicus, and now she is put aside for her own handmaid, and, bitterest of all, worse than a thousand deaths, her honor branded.

In the hands of a brutal and licentious soldiery the forlorn Octavia seemed to cling to life. Although terrified almost to death by the doom which she anticipated, the poor young creature could not make up her

\* “*Huic mulieri cuncta alia fuere præter honestum animum.*”  
—Lib. xiii. 35.

mind to die. After a few days' delay, seeing she would not put an end to herself, the order came for her execution. Loudly proclaiming her innocence, and declaring to the gods that, although maligned, she was still a virgin,\* invoking the shades of her murdered kindred and even Agrippina's lurid ghost for help. Regardless of her shrieks, they bind her limbs with fetters and open all her veins at once. As terror congealed her blood so that it would not flow, she was suffocated in a vapor bath. The severed head was borne, as in triumph, to the presence of the monster, when Poppea contemplated the traces of her rival's agony with complacency. †

Yet the depraved Senate decreed thanksgivings to the gods for these murders. The pagan historian blushes for the fallen manhood of his day. "This fact," he says, "we mention that whoever seeks acquaintance with those times, either through our writings or any other history, may suppose that thanksgivings to the gods are voted by

\* "Et tantum sororem testaretur."—xv. 64.

† Poppea herself afterwards met a terrible death, the monster having kicked her whilst *enceinte*.

the conscript fathers, with the applause of the Roman people, as often as exiles and atrocious murders are prescribed by the prince; for public and shameful disasters the same rejoicings take place as of old for great enterprises crowned with success.” \*

These as the words of the pagan who called Christianity a calamity; and said that Nero wished to exterminate it, because the Christians were odious to mankind on account of their crimes! “*O tempora! O mores!*”

We have quoted a dark page from the pagan historian of the past: in no other way could we better express the character of the first persecutor of the Church. The wretch that commences his career by trampling on the sacred ties of the domestic circle—who steeps his hands in the blood, and haunts his fireside with the shades of a murdered mother, wife, and re-

\* “*Dona ob hæc templis decreta. Quod ad eum finem memoravimus ut quicunque casus temporum illorum nobis vel aliis auctoribus noscent præsumptum habeant quotiens fugas et cædes jussit princeps totiens grates deis actas; quæque rerum secundarum olim, tum publicæ cladis insignia fuisse.*”—xiv. 64.

lative, is a tyrant indeed. What could the outer world, what could the poor Christians expect from such a monster? Nothing less than smoking ruins of their homesteads, and the stream of blood that at one time was twelve inches deep in his garden—now the Piazza of St. Peter's! \*

### III.

THOSE scenes, of tortures that make us shudder in the very thought, were stretched out like a map, far away in the deep womb of eternity, and selected in the inscrutable wisdom of Providence, as the designs of a building are accepted by an architect.

Here is the great and real cause of the persecutions of the Church : they were destined by God for his greater glory, and happy the children of men in whom were fulfilled the decrees of Divine Providence ! We would wish to stop here and hang in silence over the inscrutable ways of God ; but as he has allowed his own decrees to find their effect in the secondary causes of crea-

\* Clavis, "Chron.," an. 54.

tion, we must, in giving a brief historical sketch of the first persecution, give a few interesting glances at incidents that were the immediate cause of events that rank next in importance to the historical mysteries of Calvary—events that deluged Rome with blood, gave the Mamertine its first Christian victims, and heaven its galaxy of triumph.

May we not justly, with some of the fathers, attribute the persecution of the Christians to the innate wickedness and natural diabolical cruelty of the world personified in its rulers? Sulpicius Severus and Orosius, both priests and historians of the fifth century, tell us, even if the world had not clamored for the extermination of Christianity, Nero would have attempted it on his own account.

Hear Tertullian: “Whilst Nero ruled, Peter came to Rome, and, having performed wonderful miracles by the power given to him from God, he converted many to justice, and established for God a faithful and firm Church; which being announced to Nero, and he himself seeing that not only in Rome, but everywhere and daily, an immense number fell away from the worship of the idols,

passing over to the new religion and condemning the old, as he was an execrable and hated tyrant, he hastened to destroy the celestial temple and sweep away all justice from the face of the earth." \*

But that which was the last and immediate cause of the persecution of the Church of God was the firebrand cast by Nero into the city. In the annals of the world, in the year 66 of our Lord, we read on the same page of history, Rome was burnt and Christianity was persecuted.

Cruelty and pride suggested the thought: a house of gold, and a city called after his own name, built on the ashes of Rome. As far as human depravity could carry out the suggestion, Nero was gratified in his house of gold, purchased by one of the most destructive conflagrations on record, and by the poverty and groans of thousands of his subjects. He gathered around him the miserable satellites of his cruelties and debaucheries, and at midnight, when all were silent and wrapped in sleep, inflammable brands were flung into a guard of the pretorians, near the

\* "In Apol.," cap. 5.

spot where now stands the arch of Constantine. The quarter abounded in taverns and stores, and soon the devouring flames assumed their irresistible sway ; along the Circus Maximus it sweeps from goal to goal with the rapidity of the wind ; from the lower ground the wide-wasting element mounts the heights, and again rushes down over the interjacent valleys with a swiftness not to be retarded by human efforts. The character of the old city—a labyrinth of tortuous and narrow streets, encumbered with enormous piles of building that swarmed with inhabitants to the very tiles, contributed to accelerate the catastrophe and augment its horrors. Add to this, the terror-shrieks of women, the touching spectacle of languid age and feeble childhood making abortive efforts to escape ; some, deaf to the cries of nature and of duty, think only to save themselves, others risking life and all to save those they love. Midst the ruin of tumbling edifices that came down upon them like avalanches of fire, the fugitives are crushed with the sick and helpless they are dragging away on litters or on their shoulders ; some linger in distraction about their flaming dwellings, and, impeding

the flight of others, contribute to heighten the confusion. As to endeavors to check the conflagration there were none, for desperate gangs, denouncing such an attempt, roamed through the burning city in all directions, and tossed flaming brands to spread the fire, vociferating they knew on what authority they acted.\*

The monuments of Grecian art and of Roman power, the trophies of the Punic and Gallic wars, temples and splendid palaces, were involved in one common destruction. Of the fourteen regions or quarters into which Rome was divided only four escaped entire; three were levelled with the ground; the remaining seven which had experienced the fury of the flames displayed a melancholy scene of ruin and desolation. The splendid mansions of the Palatine, the Aventine, the Celian, and part of the Quirinal were reduced to unsightly masses of smoking ruins, whilst the relentless tyrant viewed the conflagration with delight from a tower on the Esquiline,

\* “Nec quisquam defendere audebat crebris multorum minis  
restinguere prohibentium et quia alii palam faces jaciebant,  
aque esse sibi auctorem vocerabantur; sive ut raptus licentius  
exercerent seu jussu.”—*Tacitus, “An.,” cap. 38, lib. 15.*

singing, to the accompaniment of a lyre, Lucan's verses on the burning of Troy.

The sycophants who had welcomed Nero with unbounded acclamation when he returned from the murder of his mother, and were ready to deify him for atrocities of which others were the victims, conceived different sentiments when the effects of his destructive caprice came home to themselves. The tyrant was alarmed at public indignation; neither treasures squandered amongst the multitude, nor the magnificence of the new city which he built, nor the wiles of superstition could beguile or blind the public resentment or acquit him for having burnt Rome. He would have been torn to pieces had he not adopted a stratagem to avert the fury of public indignation and direct it in another channel.

The Christians were at this time numerous in Rome. The followers of the Cross from the days the world crucified Jesus were hated, accused of every crime, and called enemies of the state. Nero knew the popular feeling against them. He seized the moment to vent the bitterness of his own heart, and give the people a food for their revenge. He accused the Christians of having burnt

Rome. He paid wretches to acknowledge their guilt and swear they were accomplices; and thus commenced the dreadful carnage of the unoffending followers of the Crucified—the first and most terrible storm that passed over the Church since the death of Christ—the first ripe field gathered into the eternal harvest: a persecution that stained Rome with blood and filled heaven with joy, thronging the peerless galaxy of heroes who follow the Lamb with the crimson stole of martyrdom.

“With this view,” writes Tacitus, the pagan slanderer of the Christians (to escape the consequences of his manifest guilt), “he inflicted the most exquisite tortures upon a herd of wretches who, under the vulgar appellation of Christians, had already become objects of execration by reason of their flagitious practices. They derived their name and origin from Christ, who in the reign of Tiberius had suffered death by the sentence of the Procurator Pontius Pilate. Suppressed by this vigorous step, the baleful superstition burst forth again, spreading itself not only over Judea, the cradle of the calamity, but through Rome, the cesspool into which are discharged the

villanies of the whole world, and where every form of superstition, no matter how profigate, can celebrate its mysteries with impunity. Having seized on some miscreants who confessed themselves to be accomplices of the Christians, on their information an immense multitude (*ingens multitudo*) were convicted, not indeed so much for having set fire to the city, but for being enemies of the human race. They were put to the most cruel deaths; their torments were embittered by derision, and turned into sources of sport and merriment for Nero and the mob. They covered their bodies with the skins of wild beasts, that they might be worried and torn to pieces by dogs; they nailed them to crosses; made bonfires of their bodies, having smeared them all over with lard and pitch, or fastened them in such a manner on pedestals and in conspicuous places, that the flames issuing from them served to light the imperial gardens, and to shed lustre on the games and public entertainments which were blended with the punishment of the Christians. Nero had ordered the imperial pleasure-grounds of the Vatican to be thrown open on this exhibition, which was set off with chariot-races

and other sports of the circus on the grandest scale. The emperor himself appeared dressed as a charioteer, by turns careering upon the course at furious speed, or mingling with the mob on foot, loaded as they were with guilt, and deserving to be made examples of. Still this revolting mixture of levity and ferociousness, added to the reflection that they were victimized through the savage baseness of the despot, and not through solicitude for the public good, contributed to change abhorrence of these wretches into commiseration of their cruel fate." \*

Such were the depravity of the times, and the virulence of calumny against the Christians, that the pagans but needed the hint from the ruling powers to discharge their pent-up fury on the devoted race. Hence they were no sooner proscribed by Nero, than they were everywhere pursued and subjected to the most excruciating torments. This was patiently permitted by Divine Providence, that future generations of men might see that the disciples should follow the Master, and that the Church triumphed over not one

\* Book xv. chap. 44.

tyrant or the tyrants of one province only, but the united force of the pagan world.

Nero had a thousand abettors in his crimes. He was the only one that revelled in such cruelties; the pagans emulated with each other in suggesting the direst cruelty. "It was deemed a virtue in them to do so," says Eusebius; "it was their study and the summit of their ambition, and that one triumphed over the others who surpassed them in refinement of cruelty."\*

"It would be vain," says Lactantius, "to attempt the description of the atrocities which the ministers of the imperial vengeance have perpetrated on the disciples of Christ in every region of the world. Merely to enumerate the various species of torments devised by their cruelty would fill many volumes, for each followed the bent of his own barbarous caprice, having received unlimited power over his victims. Some, through apprehension of being accused of lenity, surpassed the cruel orders they had received; some were incited by the hatred they had conceived against us; others by

\* Book viii. chap. 12.

desire to recommend themselves to the prince's favor and gain promotion, like that judge in Phrygia who set fire to the church when the faithful were assembled in it and burned them all to death."\*

The Apostles Peter and Paul did not suffer in the first outburst of this terrible storm. They were not in Rome at the time, being away in the East at a council in Jerusalem. They hurried back to Rome to assist and encourage the Christians in their awful affliction, and three years passed from the burning of the city to the time we find the holy Apostles prisoners in the Mamertine. During the last two years the persecution began to lull, and the Christians, who sprang up a million-fold from the blood of the martyrs, were more numerous than ever in Rome.

The preaching of SS. Peter and Paul fell with miraculous power on every circle of society; their wonderful powers were spoken of on every side, and their triumph, if we may so speak, was the cause of their ruin. But strange and interesting events took

\* "Divin. Inst.," book v. chap. ii.

place before this martyrdom. We must bring the reader once more in spirit to the new and improved city built by Nero, and contemplate an extraordinary scene that took place in the Forum, within a few yards of the Mamertine Prison.

## IV.

NERO had every vice; everything impious or infamous found a protection or an encouragement in this unparalleled monster. Amongst the crimes opposed to religion and pleasing to hell are witchcraft and diabolic magic. He was initiated into all the secrets of these dark arts, and, in the blind infatuation which they cast over the powers of reason, he foolishly imagined he would find in the livid streaks and reeking entrails of human beings the secrets by which he could rule his own divinities. It is said, when the brutes of the forest have once tasted human blood, they become infuriated for more; so, when abandoned wretches have plunged into the horrors of this abominable art, when their hands are stained

with the gore of bleeding victims, their eyes glisten in delight, and they hang for hours in mad fascination over the quivering entrails. The impostors who have pretended to gain information by these infamous studies have been ever held in hatred, and have been banished by law from every state. In Rome, the soothsayers and astrologers of Chaldea, as well as the professors of magic who generally came from the East, were proscribed by law; but, when the head of the empire was initiated, they flocked with impunity to the capital, and by the assistance of the demons occasionally performed wonders that made the people look on them as gods. Amongst the leaders of this diabolical sect, the most famous in the time and in the court of Nero was Simon Magus.

Simon, named the Magician, was a native of Samaria, and was baptized by Philip, one of the seven Deacons. Whilst yet in his native place, he saw St. Peter and St. John placing their hands on the newly converted, and conferring on them the Spirit of the Holy Ghost and the gift of languages and miracles. It was he that offered a large sum of money to St. Peter to purchase the power of per-

forming miracles, and hence arises the term of Simony—from his name—the traffic in sacred things.

After the departure of the Apostles from Samaria, Simon, instead of profiting of the charitable advice of St. Peter, became puffed up with pride, and listened to the suggestions of the evil fiend who took him entirely under his power. Apt disciple of the proud spirit of evil, he at once aspired to divine honors, and called himself the “Power of the Omnipotent,” “the Son of God,” etc. He designed a new religion, which may well be imagined as a compound of every infamy the devils could suggest. Were it not for the impiety and blasphemy expressed in his doctrines, we could laugh at their absurdity. Such, for instance, were his infamous teaching; the devils, whom he called angels, and not God, created the world; there was no such sin as impurity known before God; one of his own concubines, named Helen, was to be honored as the Holy Spirit, etc.

By the assistance of the devils, he performed some false miracles, such as to take the form of different animals, to make statues move, changing stones into bread, passing

fire without being burnt, and raising himself in the air. All these things he did before Nero, who held him in great esteem and even fear. On one occasion Nero followed him to punish him for some little difference. Simon disappeared, and instead of the magician the emperor held in his hand a little bird.

Thus; under the protection of the emperor, teaching a doctrine that flattered the pride and base passions of man, and contrasted keenly with the humility and chastity preached by the Apostles, confirming his teaching with everything that came under the demon power, this impostor was the greatest obstacle to the progress of the Gospel in the city of Rome. The Christians poured forth fervent prayers that God would confound him, that the great truth would triumph, that those who trusted in his holy name might not be shaken in their confidence by the power he permitted in his enemies. Their prayers were heard, and he who abandons the impious over to the foolish inventions of their own hearts allowed Simon to be the cause of his own ruin.

The first encounter of St. Peter with this

impostor is given us in a letter of Marcellus to the holy youths Nereus and Achilles, exiles in the Island of Pontius. The miracles performed by St. Peter on this occasion are the most authentic in the life of the great Apostle, and especially interesting to our English readers as involving the conversion of the family of the great British general Caractacus. The writer of the letter above mentioned was an eye-witness and a converted disciple of the magician—led to the knowledge of the truth on the occasion which he thus describes:

"It happened, whilst Simon was denouncing St. Peter as a magician, and endeavoring to stir up the populace against him, that there passed by that same place, with a great concourse of people and loud lamentations, the funeral of a widow's only son. Then said St. Peter to the multitude who were listening to Simon: 'Approach the bier, and let the body they are carrying to the tomb be set down between us, and let the faith of that one of us be followed as true who shall raise the dead man to life.' When the people had done this, Simon cried out: 'Now, if I make him alive, will you kill Peter?' 'We

will burn him alive!' responded the multitude. Then Simon, invoking all the demons, began by their ministry so to act that the body was moved, which, the people seeing, began to laud Simon to the skies, shouting death to Peter. He having with the greatest difficulty obtained a hearing, said to the people: 'If he be really alive, let him speak, let him walk, let him take food, let him return to his house, which if he fail to do, know that you are deceived by Simon.' On this the people cried out: 'If he do not thus, let Simon suffer the penalty he fixed for Peter!' But Simon, pretending to be insulted by being doubted of, was taking himself off when the crowd laid hold of him, and, loading him with all sorts of abuse, would not let him go. Then Peter, expanding his hands to heaven, said: 'Lord Jesus Christ, who has said to us thy disciples; "Go in my name, and cast out devils, cure the infirm, and raise the dead," reanimate this youth, that all this multitude may know that thou art God, and that there is no other besides thee, who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Ghost.'

"Immediately the youth that had been

dead rose, and, reverencing Peter, said: ‘I saw the Lord Jesus Christ commanding the angels, and saying, “At the petition of my servant Peter, let the orphan of the widow be restored to his mother.”’ Then all the people shouted with one voice: ‘Whom Peter preacheth is the only God!’ They would have burnt Simon alive, but Peter saved him, saying: ‘Our Master taught us this: To do good for evil.’”\*

Amongst the crowd who had gathered around, there happened to be a poor afflicted father who had lost his son the night before. He was returning from the Capitol, where he had been to invite some friends to the obsequies; he stood in silent grief, pensively observing all that passed. The face of the dead youth and wringing lamentations of the mother found a chord of sympathy in his own afflicted heart; the richness of his garments and the golden band on his toga announced him to be a senator; the populace knew him to be the wealthy Pudens, of the Vicus Patricius. With amazement he saw the youth bound from his bier at the

\* “*Acts of St. Petronilla*,” May 7.

prayers of Peter; he drew near the young man, he spoke to him, he convinced himself the resurrection was real; hope flashed through his aching heart; he thought a similar blessing might be brought to his own desolate home. Making his way through the crowd, he flung himself on his knees before Peter, and with many tears told his sad tale: his lovely child, in the dawn of youth, loved by all, cut down like a flower in the first fragrance of its bloom; he would give wealth, villas, and slaves, anything, but let life be brought again to the idol of his heart. St. Peter raised him gently, and in a kind, compassionating tone, told him he would go with him to his house.

"How our hearts burned as he spoke to us on the way," was said by the disciples of our Blessed Lord when he accompanied them in disguise to Emmaus. So, too, might Pudens say of the conversation that passed as he conducted the apostle to his home. The sublime mysteries of Christianity have a thrilling effect when first heard by the hapless victims of idolatry; even the savage who sees for the first time the cross on the breast of the missioner expresses in the sha-

dows that pass over his countenance the passions that are stirred in the soul. Before reaching the superb mansion of the family, Pudens was a Christian at heart. While yet on the portico strange sounds of mingled mirth and woe rolled through the halls of the stately edifice. Laurel wreaths were hung from the capitals of the columns, or laid in handsome designs on the mosaic pavement; the statues of Joy and Prosperity were veiled, and shrill, clear voices were heard now and then calling out a loved one's name, and then dying away in the touching pathos of grief. All was gloom and sorrow. The cold shadow of death fell with its icy chill on the pagan home of eighteen centuries past, with all its heart-rendings, and separations, and woes, as bitterly as it breaks the family circle of our days.

Followed by the wondering guests, the afflicted Pudens led the Apostle to the room where the sable nuptials of death were celebrated. The revel of false joy paused as the patrician moved along the brilliant galleries. The sobs of hired sympathy, and the pretended lamentations of purchased grief, were silenced by the motion of the senator's hand;

here the giddy dance stood still ; there the boisterous clowns of the pantomime looked grave ; the timbrel, the madrigal, and the flute were hushed, and every eye escorted the broken-hearted father as he led the Apostle towards the dead body of his child.

The boy was habited as on a holiday, and reclined on a glittering couch, as if reposing after the toils of sport. A stole of flowers fell from his shoulders over his white and beautiful costume ; lilies and roses were twined with the clustering ringlets of his hair ; but their bloom only served to deepen the shadows overcasting that countenance, so lately beaming with youthful joy. Those features were now steeped in the mildew of death and were cold and white. That form which used to move in all the martial sports and exercises of Roman boyhood with agility and grace that enchanted every beholder, was now motionless as a Parian statue. That eye so full of Roman majesty and ambition was shrouded in eternal night ; those lips, livid and silent, were unable to utter one word of comfort to the afflicted father as he bent over the wreck of all his cherished hopes.

The noble spouse of Pudens, Claudia, not less celebrated for her beauty than her birth as the daughter of Caractacus, and her lovely daughters Pudentiana and Praxedes, arrived at the scene of grief, weeping and loudly lamenting the affliction that had fallen on their family.\* They called on Timotheus to awake; they took him by the cold hand with fondness, and, after again and again conjuring him by name as if he still lived, they drew the Apostle by the garments towards the bier, praying him to awake their

\* It is not unlikely that Caractacus, the brave English general who defied the whole strength of the Romans for ten years, and brought to Rome in the time of Claudius, and pardoned by that emperor, contracted a second marriage while in Rome, with some lady about the court, whom British historians called Gervissa, and exalt to the honor of being the daughter of Claudius himself. What seems certain is that Caractacus daughter Claudia, who, like her father, changed her name in honor of the emperor, continued at Rome, and was married to the Senator Pudens, where she was celebrated for her beauty and virtue by the poet Martial, and commended by St. Paul amongst the chief saints of the Roman Church. See Milner's "Hist. of Winchester," page 31; Lingard, Wiley, etc. It is an interesting fact that the villa of Pudens, outside the Porta Salaria, where Caractacus afterwards lived with the family, is the property of the Irish College at Rome. Near this vineyard also is shown the spot where Nero tried to put himself to death, which, with the assistance of his freedman, ended his wretched days.

brother. The aged Apostle was moved to tears. Kneeling by the couch of death, he raised his eyes and hands towards heaven. He breathed on the lifeless form, and life came with the breath of Peter. Like sunrise in the Apennines, where morning leaps through the twilight and bursts in splendor on the plains, the balmy and resplendent ray of life fell on the motionless boy; he breathed, he panted with exuberant sensation; he bounded from the bier like an angel from his rest, and his voice rang through the hall in silvery tones of exclamation.

The parents embraced their child, and pressed him alternately to their bosoms as if beside themselves with joy. They bathed his now warm cheeks by turns with gushing tears and the most passionate caresses; then gazed upon him as if incredulous with delight, and again pressed him anew with redoubled emotion to their hearts. His sisters folded their Parian arms in their turn around him, and, looking up with tears that reflected the radiant affection of their brother's smile, upbraided him with their sorrow and made him promise not to die again.

Joy, wonder, bewilderment, and ecstasy seized the bystanders, and the murmur of those who beheld the miracle was varied as the sounds of the harp when its chords are swept by the winds of heaven. Even callous scepticism was confounded. The timid glided forward to see, and, when they beheld the delightful certainty, they trembled, and with faint shrieks shrank back as from an apparition. The aged lifted up their withered hands in amazement. Aged scepticism stroked his beard, and, setting himself firmly on the earth, peered steadfastly from under knitted eyebrows, as if determined that neither credulity nor legerdemain should fool his intellect. The bacchanal, with the ivy tangled in his dishevelled hair and reeling from his cups, drew a hand across his unsteady vision; the whirl of intoxication stopped, undulated for an instant, and, looking upon him living who had been dead, he grew sober from astonishment.

The effects of this miracle are registered far away in the annals of immortal joy. The whole family of Pudens became Christians. St. Peter lived with them, and, in the house of this noble senator, consecrated his first

altar and celebrated the Holy Sacrifice. The little capella first used by St. Peter was in after-years developed into the most remarkable shrine of the early Church. It bore the title *Ad Pastorem*. It still bears the veneration of passing generations under the name of Pudentiana, one of the maiden and sainted granddaughters of the venerable senator.

## V.

YEARS rolled on, and the magician, with the boldness of hypocrisy and error, boasted of his powers—his immortality and pretended divinity. At length it pleased God to hand him over to the foolish inventions of his own heart, and prove to the world the hypocrisy of his pretended power. With the pride of Lucifer, he boasted one day before Nero he would leave the world before all the people, and fly through the air to the immortal kingdom he had abandoned for ungrateful and insensate people. The offer was accepted, the day appointed, and preparations made on a grand scale for the ascen-

sion of the magician god. In long prayer and rigorous fasting, the Apostles prepared themselves to encounter the enemies of the Church. The Saturday beforehand was observed as a perfect fast by all the Christians in Rome, and hence commenced, as St. Augustine observes, the practice of abstaining on a Saturday in perpetual remembrance of the protection which God afforded to his Church on this important occasion.

The day appointed arrived. It was a Sunday morning in the month of September in Christian computation—in pagan, it was in the Kalends of October—in the year 67 of the Christian era. The Forum was filled with spectators. The emperor was present with all his court, confident of a great victory. Dressed in fantastic colors according to the custom of magicians at that time, and surrounded with mysterious emblems which were supposed to inspire awe in the vulgar mind, Simon stepped into the centre of the Forum with an air of conceit and pride that told of the demon that ruled within. He had a chariot prepared, in which were placed some colored fires. He stepped into the chariot. The Christians present redoubled

their prayers to God, and watched the issue with trembling hearts. It is the way of God to permit the impious to triumph awhile, that in the flush of their pride—the moment of their apparent triumph—he may cast them into deeper shame.

The appointed moment is at hand: a breathless stillness broods over the assembled thousands, and all eyes are turned towards the magician. He waves his wand, and mutters some verses. His chariot moves; it is slowly raised in the air. O God! will the enemy triumph? Will the prayers of thy people be poured forth in vain? St. Peter kneels. Whilst yet the populace are commencing the loud murmur of surprise, the lightning of heaven struck the chariot. Like a blazing aerolite it came whirling down, casting the impostor in a fearful smash at the feet of the emperor, whose golden garments were stained with his blood.

Simon was not killed. Although he fell some hundreds of feet, he was preserved that he might add the crime of suicide to the dark catalogue of his guilt. Carried in his mangled state by his followers to a part of the city called Brunda, in the shame of his blast-

ed pride, he managed to fling himself from a window, and, by another fall on the marble pavement, gave his soul to the demons to whom he had sold it.\*

Thousands were converted by this miracle. The Christians returned to their homes in joy—comforted by Him who at first seemed to sleep as when on the bark of Galilee. The pagans—especially the house of Nero—were sullen and discomfited. The heart of the tyrant became the workshop of hell's revenge; for the only power the demons can wield is the impiety of man. The temples abandoned, the concubines of the royal palace converted, and his cherished magicians proved

\* There is preserved in Rome, in the Church of Santa Maria Nuova (now St. Frances), the stone on which St. Peter is supposed to have knelt on this occasion. St. Gregory of Tours asserts he saw it, with the impression of the Apostle's knees, in the sixth century ("De Gloria Mart.", ch. xxviii.) Nearly all historians record this fall of Simon Magus. There is scarcely any fact so universally admitted. See August., "Hær.," i. epist. 36; Ambrose, lib. iv.; Hierom., cap. viii; also Sermon. 58; Cyril of Jerusalem, cap. vi.; Herodotus, lib. i. cap. i.; Arnobius, lib. ii.; Maximus, Homil. 54; Sulpicius Severus, "Hist." lib. ii.; Suetonius, lib. vi. cap. xii.; Dion Chrysostom, "Orat." 21; and many others, amongst whom Pope Linus, who was an eye-witness. The place where Simon fell is supposed to be opposite the present church of St. Martina.

to be impostors, were unpardonable crimes laid against the Christians.\*

The sword already stained and blunted in the work of the persecution is burnished and sharpened for more bloodshed. New edicts are prepared in the royal palace, and in the first week in October, in the sixty-eighth year of the Christian era, the Mamertine received its first Christian victims, whither we must now hasten to contemplate the great Apostles Peter and Paul.

\* St. John Chrysostom states in his "Homily" that the last and strongest cause of the persecution was the conversion by St. Paul of one of the concubines of Nero. Asterius, tom. v., Hom. ix., says: "Majori a labefactata voluptate effectum dolore quam si imperio pulsus esset."



## CHAPTER IV.

### THE APOSTLES IN THE MAMERTINE.

#### I.

“CLAUDITUR in tenebris hominum piscator et inde  
Bina quaterdenos retia missa trahunt  
Unda deest, Petri virga Tarpeja Rupes  
Percussa e petris larga fluenta dedit  
Clavigerum cœli, Armigeri de carcere mittunt  
Hic illis clausas pandit ad astra fores.”

MARCHINA.

**C**E have nothing in the range of our experience to compare to the horrors of nine months in this terrible prison. Those who have never seen the Mamertine, terrible in its modernized form, may conjure to the aid of imagination all that they may have read of castle-keeps, of dungeons, of dark and cheerless cells, where the victims of injustice and tyranny have been cruelly immured, yet the Mamertine could equal in the reality the gloomiest picture of fancy. Leave thy home of luxury for a moment, and look into that

cell that was never brightened by the cheerful ray of day, and behold chained to a column the greatest heroes the world ever possessed. Let not the darkness and fetid air drive you back: pass through the aperture in the rocky roof into the first prison; it alone would be sufficient to terrify; but yet through another opening, and descend into the lower dungeon. There, with the light of that halo which reverence casts around those prisoners, behold the rock on which the church of Jesus Christ has been built; beside him, in similar chains, the vessel of election, the Apostle of the Gentiles! See the hard bed on which they sleep; the cold, damp walls, the food of bread and water, and the harsh treatment of the cruel keepers! Count the lonely hours and days passed for nine months in one dreadful, unbroken night; and shudder at the picture imagination will give in filling in the horrors of the imprisonment. It is by contemplating such places and such scenes we arrive at some idea of what the early Christians suffered for their faith; and it is in the study of their heroism and fidelity we learn to blush for our timid and effeminate Christianity.

One thought, perchance, afflicted—the longing to preach. Yet the apostles and martyrs were happy in their prisons. No privations could touch the soul at peace with God. The more abandoned and deprived of earthly comfort, the more the virtuous soul clings to him, and he, who loves from on high and watches the soul in trouble, pours around it that peace which surpasseth all understanding. It was in an ecstasy of delight that St. Paul, commencing his epistle when in prison, wrote: “In chains for Jesus Christ.”

But why the apostles were so long confined in the Mamertine will necessarily be asked. A tyrant so cruel as Nero, roused to such hatred and indignation against those holy men, makes their long imprisonment the more extraordinary. They deprived him of his favorite concubine, they seduced from the circle of his confidants the ablest of his secretaries, and they defeated, and in the sight of all the people, the companion of his dissipation, the medium of his incantations and charms. These were triumphs not easily to be borne by a wretch like Nero, who knew no master but passion and caprice. Great, then, must have been the cause that stayed the revenge

of the tyrant. We Christians ask: "What was the arrangement of Providence, that still spared for so many months those great lights and pillars of the Church?" A glance at the events that were passing around the imperial palace at this time will give a clue to answer this difficulty.

Nero had sent the apostles to prison, and intended at his convenience to put them to a most cruel death. In the meantime he discovered a terrible conspiracy to end his career of infamy. Catus Piso, wearied, as was the whole world, with the excesses of this tyrant, determined to murder him. He gained many followers amongst the senators, the commanders of the army and fleet, and the noble families of the city, but the plot was discovered by the imprudence of one of the conspirators. They had decided to make the attempt during the Circensian games, in honor of the goddess Ceres. It was arranged that Lateranus (the owner of the Lateran palace of those days), on account of his great physical strength and courage, having embraced the emperor's knees, as if in urging some petition, should overthrow him, and that, while thus held down, the officers and

others should fall on him and despatch him. One of their number, named Scevinus, implored that he might be placed in the van, as he was in possession of a dagger which he had carried off from a temple in Etruria, and which he wore as a weapon destined by the Fates for some great exploit. It was by the bravadoing of this man the affair got wind; although Tacitus remarks, how a conspiracy of such immense hazard, known to numbers of all orders, ages, sexes, was kept secret so long, was truly wonderful. “Scevinus, having conferred for some time with Antonius Natalis, came home on the eve of the day that was to be fatal to Nero; and, with all due formality, first of all made his will, then, unsheathing the aforesaid dagger, began to curse its rusty point, and, handing it to his freedman Milicho, made him go and whet it on a rock until it was as sharp as lightning. Then, having dined more sumptuously than was his wont, he gave their liberty to some of the slaves, to others sums of money, and, with a rueful expression of face and a perturbation of mind but ill-disguised by the levity of his discourse, gave orders for bandages, and other matters for staunching

wounds, to the same Milicho. From these movements, and from some fatal expressions which the bravado let fall, Milicho suspected what was brewing, and, having taken counsel with his wife, she not only confirmed his suspicions, but so worked on his cowardice and cupidity that the morning had hardly dawned when his master was apprehended on his information. Soon after him they seized Natalis, who was the first to turn traitor, impeaching both his friend Piso and Seneca, against whom Nero was only seeking an excuse to gratify his hatred. On hearing this, Scevinus out with all the rest, amongst whom Lucan, Quintianus, and Seneca held out for a long while, but, after a promise of pardon, they endeavored to atone for this delay—Lucan by denouncing his own mother Atillia, and Quintianus and Seneca by betraying each his bosom friend.”\*

A fearful slaughter of the great men of the empire commenced. Every one on whom the least suspicion could fall was dragged to torture and death, and so forgotten and lost was the brave old Roman

\* Tacitus, as above, chapter lvii.

spirit of the Republic that these men consented to die without making one blow for liberty. Some of them, nevertheless, met death with great bravery.

Seneca had the choice of death given him. The old philosopher, by far the greatest man of the day, opened the veins of his feet in hot water that he might bleed to death; finding death did not come quick enough, he took poison, and was finally suffocated. It is said he was intimate with St. Paul, and there are still extant some letters that passed between them. Their authenticity is somewhat doubted.

When Subrius Flavius was questioned by Nero, whilst under torture, why as a soldier had he forgotten his oath, "Never," he bravely replied, "was pretorian more devoted to his emperor than I to you while you deserved my loyalty; but I began to execrate you from the time that, having murdered your mother and your spouse, you turned charioteer, buffoon, and incendiary." \*

In Peto, the historian tells us that virtue itself was proscribed. His wife, hearing he

\* Tacitus, *ut supra.*

was condemned, exhorted him to anticipate the sentence, not to give the tyrant the satisfaction of torturing him. To animate him to this false bravery, she seized a dagger and plunged it into her own breast, then, drawing it out reeking with blood, she handed it to Peto, saying : "Take this weapon, Peto : the wound I have inflicted does not pain me, but that which you will inflict on yourself will bring me a mortal agony." Martial commemorates this courageous woman in one of his epigrams :

"Casta suo gladium cum traderet Arria Peto,  
Quem de visceribus traxerat ipsa suis ;  
Si qua fides vulnus quod feci, non dolet, inquit,  
Sed quod tu facies, hoc mihi, Pete, dc let."

Thus the city was filled with funerals, and the capital with sacrifices. The houses his wrath had visited might be known by the laurel leaves and garlands around their portals. In the bloodshed of the nobles and patricians, the tyrant had not time to think of the poor despised Christians, and amongst them the apostles in the Mamertine.

Having terrified all who could entertain a thought against his life, Nero determined to take a journey to Greece, to superintend im-

mense works he had previously undertaken. It was his intention to cut the Isthmus of Corinth, and thus shorten the sea-route to the Archipelago. After enormous expense, he failed, as Julius Cæsar had failed before him.

In the meantime, whilst the tyrant is away, strange things were passing in the Mamertine. The apostles were chained, but the word of God was not chained. They converted their keepers, and forty-seven others confined along with them in the prison. We will quote the original text of the Acts of SS. Martinianus and Processus: they lead us to a series of events as strange as they are interesting.

## II.

“At the time that Simon Magus destroyed himself through pride and shame, the impious Nero delivered the blessed Apostles Peter and Paul to Paulinus, a man of great power, who handed the apostles over to the keepers of the Mamertine prison. There came to them many infirm Christians, and they were cured of their diseases; others possessed by

devils were freed by the prayers of the apostles. There were also appointed for the guardianship of the apostles a great number of soldiers, amongst whom were two captains named Processus and Martinianus. When they had seen the wonders that were performed by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ, full of admiration they said to them: 'Venerable men, you cannot doubt but Nero has by this time forgotten you, since this is the ninth month that you have been in prison; we pray you, therefore, go wheresoever you wish, but first, in the name of Him by whom you work such miracles, baptize us.' The Apostles Peter and Paul said to them: 'If you will believe in the name of the Trinity with your whole heart and soul, you also will be able to do those things which you have seen us doing.' When those who were in the prison heard this, they all unanimously cried out: 'Give us water, for we perish with thirst.' At the same time, blessed Peter the Apostle, in the same Mamertine prison, said to them all, 'Believe in God the Father Almighty, and our Lord Jesus Christ his only begotten Son, and the Holy Ghost, and all will be ministered to you.'

"Then they all cast themselves at the feet of the apostles, praying that they might be baptized by them. The blessed apostles prayed to God ; their prayer being finished, the blessed Peter made the sign of the cross on the Tarpeian rock in the same prison, and at the moment water flowed from the rock, and Processus and Martinianus were baptized by blessed Peter the Apostle. When all those who were in the prison had seen this, they cast themselves at the feet of the blessed Apostle Peter, and they were baptized, of different sexes and different ages, to the number of forty-seven. He offered for them the Sacrifice of Praise (the Blessed Eucharist), and made them participate of the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. Then SS. Processus and Martinianus said to the holy apostles of Christ, ' Go where you will, since Nero has forgotten you and despaired of you.'

"The apostles then went out of the prison by the way called the Appian, and arrived at the Appian gate. Near a hedge in the Via Nuova, there fell from the foot of blessed Peter a bandage, for the iron chains had cut him ; and when he had come to the Appian gate he saw our blessed Lord, and, recogniz-

ing him, said to him, ‘Lord, where art thou going?’ and the Lord said, ‘To Rome, to be crucified again.’ Peter returned to Rome by daylight, and the soldiers seized him.

“ It having been announced to Paulinus the prefect, that Processus and Martinianus had been made Christians, he sent soldiers, and having seized them ordered them to be cast into prison. The next day he ordered them to be led forth, and, being conducted into his presence, he said: ‘Have you thus become so foolish that, abandoning the gods and goddesses whom our invincible rulers worship, whom antiquity adores, you are led to be deprived of the ornaments of your (military) service?’ Martinianus with a clear voice replied: ‘We have already commenced to participate in the sacraments of a celestial warfare.’ Paulinus then said: ‘Put away the madness of your breasts, and adore the immortal gods, whom you have venerated and worshipped from your cradles, and in whose religion you have been brought up.’

“ But the blessed martyrs with one voice said: ‘We are now Christians.’

“ Paulinus said: ‘Hear me, my companions in arms, and do what I tell you. Be my

friends and enjoy your military position, and live sacrificing to the omnipotent gods, and you will be illustrious with our princes.'

"They both replied: 'Tis sufficient that we have declared to you that we are true Christians, and servants of God and our Lord Jesus Christ, whom his blessed Apostles Peter and Paul have preached.'

"Paulinus said: 'I have already said, again repeating I say, take my advice and live.'

"But they were silent. Again and again Paulinus urged them, but, finding it to no effect, ordered their mouths to be bruised with stones. After they had been beaten a long time, both cried out together: "Glory be to God on high."

"Paulinus said to the soldiers, 'Bring out the tripod, that they may sacrifice to the divinities.' But the blessed martyrs replied: 'We have already offered sacrifice to the one omnipotent God.'

"The tripod being brought forth, Paulinus said: 'Do what I say.' They also brought out the golden statue of Jupiter, but the holy martyrs, seeing it, laughed, and spat at the tripod and statue of Jupiter before Paulinus himself.

“Then Paulinus ordered them to be stretched on the rack and to be beaten with clubs. But they, with cheerful looks and rejoicing, said: ‘We give thee thanks, O Lord Jesus Christ.’

“Paulinus, incensed to great fury, ordered flames to be applied to their sides; but the martyrs said: ‘Blessed be the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, whom his Apostles Peter and Paul have preached.’

“There was at that time a most noble lady of the name of Lucina. Assisting them, she encouraged them with these words: ‘Be firm, soldiers of Christ, and do not fear pains, which are only of a short duration.’

“Paulinus again said to them: ‘What madness is this?’ But they persevered, and smiled at their torments. Paulinus then ordered them, whilst still stretched on the rack, to be beaten with whips, with iron spikes attached to the lashes, whilst the herald declared, with a loud voice: ‘Do not despise the orders of the prince.’ At the same moment the left eye of Paulinus was struck blind, and, by force of great pain being led to repent, exclaimed, ‘O verses of magic art!’ and ordered them

to be taken from the rack, and, although much lacerated, to be cast once more into the Mamertine prison. The venerable matron Lucina carefully attended to them.

"The third day afterwards Paulinus, seized by the devil, suddenly expired. His son, Pomponius, crying out with a loud voice, ran to the palace, and said: 'Come forth, ye rulers of the state, and let those professors of the magic art be exterminated.'

"Caesarius, the prefect of the city, hearing those things, related the facts to Nero, who ordered them to be put to death immediately; and Pomponius, the son of Paulinus, urged the prefect of the city not to delay. Then the prefect put the sentence into execution. Taking them out of prison, he had them brought outside the walls of the city of Rome, on the Via Aurelia, where they were beheaded.

"When the blessed Lucina saw them, she followed them, with her family, to the Aqueduct, where they were beheaded; and their bodies, left to be devoured by dogs, this holy matron gathered together, and, casting over them most precious balms, she buried them in a sand-pit in her own

garden, near the place of their execution on the sixth Nones of July, in the Via Aurelia, where even to the present day blessings are received from them, reigning our Lord God and Saviour Jesus Christ."

A church was erected to the memory of these martyrs on the Aurelian Way, and here Gregory the Great delivered the thirty-second of his Homilies, in which he relates some interesting miracles that took place at their tombs. In the time of the Goths, relates this holy Pope, there was a pious matron who used to come to the tomb of these holy martyrs to pray. One day she had come according to her custom, and when leaving she saw two men, dressed as pilgrims, in a sort of monastic costume, standing outside. At first she thought they were pilgrims, and was going to give them a charity; but they, approaching nearer to her, said: "You visit us now: we will seek you on the day of judgment. We will do for you whatsoever we are able." So saying, they disappeared. She was frightened, and returned to her prayers, and became more zealous in her piety, as she was more en-

couraged by the promise of these holy martyrs.

Their relics were afterwards removed to St. Peter's by Paschal I., and are now under the altar, at the end of the right transept, under the dome. Here the great Council of the Vatican was held in 1869, and over their altar was erected the throne of the 247th successor of him who baptized them in the Mamertine. Their church on the Aurelian Way does not exist any longer. Becoming dangerous and abandoned, it was destroyed in the time of Urban VIII., and the material was used by a man named Colangelo to build the casino of his villa.

On the Appian Way is still shown the spot where our blessed Lord appeared to St. Peter. We have gathered some interesting reminiscences of this place. We will make them the subject of our next chapter; but we must beg the reader's attention for a few minutes, while we make some observations on the extraordinary and miraculous well called from the rock by St. Peter, and still shown in the Mamertine.



## CHAPTER V.

### THE MIRACULOUS WELL.

**N**EXT to the hallowed reminiscences that hang around the walls of this prison, there is nothing more interesting than the little well in the centre of the pavement. It is itself not only an existing monument of the miracle that St. Peter, like another Moses, performed in bringing water from the rock, but is even to this day a puzzle to the learned, who can find no explanation for its extraordinary and perennial equality of depth, except by falling back on another miracle. It has been proved as a fact that the water never becomes more nor less. On the feast of SS. Peter and Paul, and during the octave, the prison is crowded with devout Romans, who, in the course of a few

hours, draw away tons of this water. Yet the little well is inexhaustible—always the same level, the same depth. Even persons who were somewhat incredulous had the fact proved by applying a powerful exhaustive machinery, which failed to have any more effect than the devotion of the people. Baronius refers to this when he says, “Notissimum est rei experimentum,” etc.\*; and Bozio, “Et plurimis est experimentis compertum,” etc.† We have nothing in the laws of science to explain this fact. There are thirty or forty feet of rock beneath the spring; there is no spring that we know of within a mile of the Capitol (especially on the Mamertine side of the Tarpeian), and no body of water that could give the supply required for the Mamertine, except that which is brought into Rome by the aqueducts. The nearest is the Aqua Felice, which passes over the summit of the Capitol. It comes from the Quirinal, acts as a fountain, and passes on to render its services to various parts of the city, in the direc-

\* “Annals,” vol. i., year 68.

† In lib. i., “De Signis,” chap. xv.

tion of St. Peter's. No leakage or breakage, or even a secret conduit to the Mamertine, could account for the unalterable depth of this little well.

But we are walking on slippery ground, and we dare not of ourselves venture to assert this extraordinary circumstance. We live in an age in which little faith is given to anything beyond the power and vision of men. We will therefore give a few testimonials from great and learned men, who have seen this well in centuries past, and speak of it as we do now.

Baronius writes of this fountain thus: "In the same prison, Processus and Martinianus, soldiers and guardians of the Apostles, were converted to the faith, and by holy baptism in the same place received into the Church, a fountain springing by the divine power from the rock, as their Acts testify. It is worthy of admiration that this fountain exists still, and not only memorable for the events that passed near it, *but is to this day a continued miracle.* For it is placed in the middle of the prison, amidst immense layers of travertine clinging together, and the rock is perforated to the depth of a cubit, and in

breadth about a palm; and thus the water oozes (into this fountain) in such a manner that it never overflows, and, no matter how much may be taken out, it never becomes dry. This fact is well known,\* for on certain festival days, when this prison is visited for religious motives by a great concourse from every part of the city, all the faithful both drink and take away water, and yet the fountain remains unfailing."

Bosius still more beautifully refers to this extraordinary well:

"In the year 68 it happened that St. Peter was cast into the Mamertine prison. He was watched by the soldiers Processus and Martinianus, who, at the exhortation of St. Peter, gave themselves to the name of Christ; and, since there was no water in that place to baptize them, a fountain miraculously sprang from the solid rock, and from this water baptism was administered to them. To this miracle, that the water first flowed

\* "Admiratione enim digna est res, eumdem illic fontem in hanc usque diem perseverare, non tantum rerum ibi gestarum memoria nobilem, sed PERENNI ILLUSTREM MIRACULO. . . . Sic aqua scaturit, ut nec foras exundet, dec quam-tumlibet hauriatur, unquam siccetur. Notissimum est ejus rei experimentum," etc.

suddenly from the rock, we have a second, that it remained in a copious fountain, as the Acts of the Martyrs testify, which are still extant, and moreover, after 1520 years,\* the spring flowing from the dry marble has not been yet dried up. But what surpasses all, as each one may try for himself, and has already been proved by many, it never becomes empty; although you may take from it as much as you wish. It is three feet deep and one foot wide. Every year it is visited by an immense concourse of people. There is no one but drinks and takes away with him some of this beautiful water. It never, however, becomes less, and, what will surprise you even more, it always remains the same depth, whether the water is taken out of it or not. It neither diminishes nor overflows. I do not send you to the Indies nor to our antipodes for these wonders. The Mamertine prison is at the foot of the Capitol, there is the fountain; there this strange fact can be seen at any moment."\*

In the Acts of St. Lucina, an aged widow cast into this prison in the commencement of the fourth century, under Diocletian, we read

\* Now 1807 years.

\* In lib. i., "De Signis," c. xv.

she was cast into a prison where “Ex ejus fundamentis fluvio exundante,” etc. (a stream of water rising from its foundations).\*

The learned Mabillon alludes to a MS. of the ninth century, in which an allusion is made to “the fountain of St. Peter where his prison is”—“Fons S. Petri ubi est carcer ejus.” †

We find very little mention of this fountain in the Middle Ages. The prison has been frequently mentioned. This we can very easily understand, if we remember the difficulty of getting to the lower prison. Before the present commodious flight of stairs was made in 1665, it was necessary to descend through the openings in the roof or ceiling. Moreover, the horrible effluvia and darkness would damp the most fervent curiosity; and we may safely presume that there were few whose love of the antiquities brought them to the lower prison of the

\* See *Acts in Bollandists*, September 16.

† In tom. iv., “*Veterum Analectorum*,” page 509. This MS. is a guide for Rome, as it stood then. It was written by a member of the court of Charlemagne, in 800, and discovered by the monks of St. Maurus in a library in Einsiedeln. It can be seen almost entirely quoted in Wiley’s “History of the Papal States,” vol. i.

Mamertine. But since the stairs have been made and the ingress facilitated, thousands from every country have visited either through piety or curiosity this prison of the apostles and martyrs, and this most ancient relic of the Rome of the past.\*

Cancellieri, who flourished in the last century, and who has written several works of interest and erudition on the Christian monuments of Rome in his notice of this miraculous well makes allusion to other springs miraculously called into existence by St. Venantius and St. Lawrence, and then adds:

"But this of the Mamertine is more wonderful than all the others by reason of the continual prodigy that may be seen there by everybody. The well may be seen on one side of the pavement. . . . The mouth being made larger for the convenience of the number of devout people who flock thither to

\* Cancellieri has written some most exhaustive works on Roman antiquities. His defence of the Mamertine as the real Tullian prison, against Baronius, is powerful and convincing. From his little work, entitled "Notizie del Carcere Tulliano," long out of print, we gather much of the information we present to the reader in these pages.

take of this water, which always maintains the height of one palm and eleven inches, without ever flowing over or ever becoming less; although it is very shallow, you may continually take from it as much as you wish."

That the sanction of the Church has been given to the extraordinary character of this well, and that the Holy See has, through several of its popes, encouraged the devotion of the people around this sanctuary, we have only to refer to the following inscription\* placed in marble in the wall of the upper prison,

\* "This (is the) Mamertine prison, the most celebrated in the world, in which the most holy Apostles Peter and Paul, detained more than nine months through the cruelty of Nero, baptized (literally *sprinkled*) Processus and Martinianus, the keepers, and forty-seven others, afterwards martyrs, a miraculous fountain of water having sprung forth, (which is) constantly flowing up to the present time, and never decreasing from frequent consumption. The blessed Pope Sylvester, at the request of Constantine the Great, dedicated it as a church to these Saints; and afterwards Gregory XIII. honored it during the kalends of August by the celebration of the full Sacrifice of Expiation. To increase, therefore, the celebrity of this prison, Benedict XIII., the chief pastor, of the Order of Preachers (Dominicans), consecrated the repaired inner altar, with similar solemnity, on the fourth ides of November, 1726. The President and officers of the Archconfraternity of the Carpenters of St. Joseph have erected a lasting monument of these things."

about the year 1725, shortly after the consecration of the altar by Benedict XIII. :

D. O. M.

Carcerem hunc Mamertinum,  
 Universo terrarum orbe celeberrimum,  
 In quo  
 Sanctissimi Apostoli Petrus et Paulus,  
 Neronis feritate novem et ultra mensibus detenti,  
 Processum et Martinianum, custodes,  
 Ac alios quadraginta septem, deinde martyres,  
 Prodigiosi subito exorti fontis aqua,  
 Ad haec usque tempora perenne pullulantis,  
 Nec ex frequenti haustu unquam decrescentis,  
 asperserunt.  
 Divus Sylvester Papa  
 Constantini magni precibus, iisdem in ecclesiam dicavit;  
 Et subinde Gregorius XIII.  
 Kalendis Augusti plena piaculorum omnium expiatione  
 perpetuo insignivit.  
 Ad carceris itaque celebritatem augendam, interiorem  
 aram reparatam,  
 BENEDICTUS XIII. P.M. ORD. PRAEDICATOR.  
 IV. idus Nov. MDCCXXVI. pari solemnitate consecravit.  
 Gubernator et ufficiales  
 Archiconfraternitatis S. Josephi Carpenteriorum  
 æternum tantorum operum monumentum apponi  
 curarunt.

The only objection we have found in what we have read concerning this well is in the guide-book generally used by English visitors in Rome. Here the objection raised is

not against the extraordinary character, of which the anonymous writer says nothing, nor against the antiquity, but against the origin which tradition has given it as one of the miracles of St. Peter. The writer in the “Red Necessity,” as Murray’s Guide is facetiously called by our Anglo-Saxon friends, speaks thus of the well, and other pious relics of the Mamertine: “The Church tradition has consecrated this prison as the place where St. Peter was confined by order of Nero. The pillar to which he was bound is shown, together with the fountain which miraculously sprang up to enable him to baptize his jailers, Processus and Martinianus; *although it is distinctly alluded to by Plutarch* in the exclamation of Jugurtha, when thrown into prison. On the side of the descent into the lower prison, a curious relic meets the eye—the impression of St. Peter’s head on the surface of the rock, driven against it by his jailers, to recognize which requires no small degree of devotional credulity” (page 77).

There is an insinuation here which is not fair. The writer must have known that he was attacking a fact that has been sustained

by historians of weight, and one sacred in the traditions of the people, sanctified by the authority of the Church. By a vague, unsubstantiated assertion like this, he throws ridicule on the historians that have proved and sustained the tradition; and unscrupulously casts a slur on the authority of the Catholic Church, which allows nothing to pass the sanctity of her zeal without the most rigid scrutiny. If the writer in question had a strong text against us, he would quote it to our confusion. If there were any weight in the difficulty he attempts to draw from Plutarch, men of learning, of admitted probity and erudition, would give credit to the doubt; but the objection is a silly one, and we can only account for its absurdity from the fact that the author of it was either ignorant or malicious. Since he did not give the text, we will give it for him, and let those who are separated from the fold of the Catholic Church read here one out of the many absurd difficulties brought against her mementos and traditions of the past.

Plutarch relates, when Marius had conquered the Cimbri and taken Jugurtha prisoner, he brought this brave but cruel

general to grace his triumph at the capital at Rome. As was customary, the state prisoners of war were handed over to the keepers of the Mamertine to be executed. When Jugurtha was being cast into the lower prison, he exclaimed: "By Hercules! how cold is your bath."

The text in Greek is: '*Ηρακλὲς, εἰπεν, ὡς ψυχρὸν ὑμῶν το βαλνεῖον.*'

Here the word *βαλνεῖον* cannot mean anything but bath. How a small well ten inches wide could be called a bath we are at a loss to know. How Jugurtha could have fallen into it, impossible from its size and position, for it is not under the opening through which prisoners were cast into the prison, we must leave for the author of the objection to expound. We can easily understand how a cold, dark, and damp hole, as was the Mamertine, could be compared to an unpleasant bath, especially as this word in the Italian, derived from the Latin *balneum*, has sometimes the signification of a filthy, dirty recess.

Sallust, who wrote the history of Jugurtha and describes this prison accurately, makes no allusion whatsoever to this foun-

tain, which he certainly would have done if it were there in the time of Jugurtha. Not one historian has mentioned it; and, with the exception of this manifest contortion of a sentence from Plutarch, there is no account of this well until the first century of the Christian era.

Moreover, it is probable this prison was called in ridicule by the people of those days, "Mamertine's bath." Cancellieri asserts this for a fact on the authority of ancient writers. Here are his words: "I find it thus called in Publius Victor and Sixtus Rufus, and also in Panciroli in his description of the fourteen regions of the city with their public and private edifices, reproduced in 1651 by Labbé, and again by Muratori. We have heard Jugurtha say, 'How cold is your bath, Quirites,' perhaps because this place was called thus ironically." ("Forse dall' essere stato così chiamato ironicamente quel sito.")\*

Thus the reader may judge how unreliable are many similar assertions scattered through the "Red Necessity." Moreover, we will have occasion in this work to speak

\* Cancellieri, "Notizie del Carcere Tulliano," page 41.

of several fountains in Rome of a miraculous character, not mentioned in Murray's Guide.

With regard to the impression of a human face in the stone wall of the prison, now seen on the modern stairs descending to the lower prison, there is a pious tradition that, through the cruelty of one of the jailers, the head of St. Peter was pressed against the wall, where the hard stone, as if it were wax, received the impression of his features. The stone has been removed several times, and was put in its present position when the altar was consecrated by Benedict XIII. in the year 1726. It is covered with an iron grating, and has these words in Italian, neatly printed over it: "In questo sasso Pietro da di testa spinto da sbirri et il prodigo resta." The style of this inscription is of two or three centuries past. There is another in Latin which runs thus:

DUM IN INTERIOREM HUNC CARCEREM  
B. PETRUS APOSTOLUS  
NERONIS JUSSU CONTRUDITUR  
CAPITE LAPIDI SATELLITUM IMPULSU  
IMMANITER IMPACTO  
FACIEI VESTIGIUM STATIM IMPRIMITUR.

We can trace the tradition through the last five centuries, but not further. All the writers who treat of the relics and treasures of Rome, speak of this impression of St. Peter in the Mamertine; amongst them the most ancient are Panciroli, Torrigio, Piazza, Pauliano, and others. With a good light the features are easily discerned. If the tradition of this stone be true, and we have no reason to doubt it, it gives us an insight into the sufferings of the apostles; to the horrors of the prison; we get an idea of the rude treatment of the keepers, who were accustomed to heap every indignity and insult on the unfortunate being committed to their brutal care.



## CHAPTER VI.

“DOMINE, QUO VADIS?”

### I.

THE APPIAN.

“**S**ISTE viator!”—once the mournful appeal read on a thousand monuments, inviting the wayfarers of the Appian to read the praises of the dead, who in the pride that outlived them would be known in their tombs, is now the gentle whisper of the genius of History to the pilgrim who tramples on the green grass of the once famous Queen of Ways—

“Qua limite noto  
Appia longorum territori REGINA VIARUM”

—a stupendous monument of the old commonwealth, grander, more useful, and more expensive than the aqueducts that stride the Campagna on gigantic arches, dearer to the

Romans because it bore to their gates an unbroken stream of wealth, of triumph and fame, and was enriched with the mausoleums and the memories of their mighty dead. Here passed multitudes from distant climes, pouring into the metropolis of nations. Embassies vying with each other in the costliness and singularity of their gifts, and splendor of their retinues; envoys from the remote climes of India, with dusky faces and foreheads wreathed with silken turbans; astrologers from Chaldea; merchants and magicians, pagan priests and sorcerers, from Egypt; Asiatic monarchs upon elephants caparisoned with jewelry and gold; Moorish kings and Parthian satraps, with squadrons of wild horses, from beyond the Hydaspes and Mount Atlas:

“Pretors, proconsuls, to their provinces  
Hastening, or on return in robes of state,  
Lictors with rods the ensigns of their power,  
Legions and cohorts, turms of horse and wing.” \*

Here passed men of all colors, and costumes, and degrees of civilization, from the Ethiop, the Arab, and the Sarmatian to the Attic Greek. The pomp, the chivalry, and stately

\* “Rome as she was,” etc.

religion of the whole Roman world seemed to be grouped together and interwoven in that concourse as it marched along towards the city gates, an august procession, bearing the tributes and the offerings of all people to the Queen of Empire and the domicile of the gods.

Temples and tombs adorned with precious marbles, with statuary and elegiac inscriptions, lined the great thoroughfare on either side for many a mile before it came to the massive walls. As if Death had come out to welcome the myriads hastening to his carnival, the brave, the gay, and the ambitious in pressing forward were encountered by other processions which issued forth towards the suburbs in all the gloom and melancholy pomp of the funeral to the tomb.

Twenty-one centuries of wreck and ruin have passed over the Appian, and left it as it was originally before Rome was built—a portion of the Campagna. Vineyards are cultivated and cattle graze where once stood temples, and mansions, and mausoleums, encrusted with marble and gold. Here and there a broken wall covered with ivy, a block of masonry that once was a tomb,

and now an osteria, a few lava-blocks clinging together with exceptional tenacity in the midst of a meadow of waving grass, are all that is left us of the rich suburbs of the world's metropolis. In the shapeless masses of ruin that have been left of cities that flourished three or four thousand years ago we can trace temples, fortress walls, aqueducts, and tombs; but so great has been the annihilation and destruction on the Appian that for several miles outside the city we have not one vestige of its magnificent past. In vain would Cicero ask the people of our generation if the heroes who slept in such gorgeous tombs were happy. "An tu egressus Porta Capena cum Catilini, Scipionum, Serviliorum, Metellorum sepulchra vides, miseros putas illos?" \* Not more than a learned conjecture can now point out the grass-covered mounds that once bore those monuments.

"Tombs and temples overthrown and prostrate; small fragments of columns, friezes, pediments; great blocks of granite and marble; mouldering arches, grass-grown and decayed; ruin enough to build a spacious

\* "Quest. Tusculanæ," i.

city from. Sometimes loose walls built up from these fragments by the shepherds; sometimes a ditch between two mounds of broken stones, obstructed our progress; sometimes the fragments themselves rolling from beneath our feet made a toilsome matter to advance, but it was always ruin. Now we tracked a piece of old road above the ground, now traced it underneath a grassy covering as if that were its grave, but all the way was ruin. In the distance, ruined aqueducts went stalking on their giant course along the plain, and every breath of wind that swept towards us stirred early flowers and grasses springing up spontaneously on miles of ruin. The unseen larks above us, who alone disturbed the awful silence, had their nests in ruin; and fierce herdsmen clad in sheepskins, who now and then scowled out upon us from their sleeping nooks, were housed in ruin. The aspect of the desolate Campagna, in one direction where it was most level, reminded me of an American prairie; but what is the solitude of a region where men have never dwelt to that of a desert, where a mighty race have left their foot-prints in the earth from which they have

vanished ; where the resting-places of the dead have fallen like their dead, and the broken hour-glass of Time is but a heap of idle dust ?

How often have the legions in triumphant march gone glittering across that purple waste, so silent and unpeopled now ! ” \*

God destroyed the city and temple of Jerusalem ; he ordered the plough to be drawn over its foundations, not alone in punishment of the perfidy of the Jews, but to symbolize in their destruction the end of the typical law and the commencement of the new covenant foreshadowed in their rites. Thus he sent the lightnings of heaven to destroy the temples and tombs that were the pride of pagan Rome. The plough has literally passed over the site of those superb edifices that first intimated to the traveller the idolatry and superstition of the great city. “ Thou sawest, O king, till a stone was cut without hands from a mountain, and it smote the image on its feet that were of iron and clay, and broke them to pieces. Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the

\* “ Pictures from Italy.”

gold broken to pieces together, and became like the dust of the summer threshing-floor." (Dan. ii.)

## II.

ABOUT a mile outside of the walls of modern Rome, on the Appian, there is a little chapel bearing the strange title of "Lord, where are you going?" Humble and dilapidated, it is in keeping with the solitude it breaks, but the student of the past finds a halo of reminiscence around it, that makes it attractive like its grand historic surroundings.

In the year 42 of Christianity, and 696 of the city of Rome, there came by this spot on the Appian two lonely wayfarers from the East. They might have passed for father and son. Threescore years and upwards seemed to have passed over the old man's head. It was bald or shorn on the crown, and encircled by a fillet or wreath of hair, like to that of his beard, which was crispy and of a silvery gray. His brow was elevated, and he seemed rapt in lofty thought. His cheeks were furrowed; his eye—vivid as the lightning—was bloodshot, and indicated much weeping;

his aspect was pale, but a celestial shadow of humility imparted an air of majesty. A reed terminating in a cross was his only staff, and that he seemed to carry rather as an emblem of his mission than to alleviate his pilgrimage or sustain the infirmity of his years. About him there was an air of mystery that confounded the conjecture it excited. He looked like an ambassador, the agent of some mighty enterprise, some mysterious power, yet who more destitute of everything that is wont to distinguish an earthly potentate? Unheralded and unadorned by pomp, jaded and travel-stained, he journeyed on with his meek companion, barefooted and in silence. If heeded, it was to be scoffed at or eyed with contempt by the proud and gorgeous multitudes thronging to the metropolis of all nations. That old man who thus passes unknown in the crowd on the Appian Way is the great Apostle Peter; his companion is his faithful disciple and amanuensis St. Mark.

We may have to record scenes more interesting around the “Domine, quo vadis?” but none more important. His coming to Rome was one of the most remarkable

events in the history of the city—yea, in the history of the world—an event that cast its shadow over the vicissitudes of millions of the human race and influenced their destinies in eternity. The words of Pope Leo are full of unction, and, as it were, congratulation to the holy apostle on his coming to Rome:

“To this city, therefore, thou, O most blessed Apostle Peter, didst not hesitate to come. The colleague of thy glory, the Apostle Paul, being still occupied in the ordination of other churches, thou, as it were alone, didst venture into this forest of howling monsters, displaying greater constancy by embarking on the ocean of turbulent and fathomless iniquity, than when thou didst walk upon the waters. Already thou hadst initiated in the faith those of the circumcision who believed; already thou hadst founded the Church of Antioch, where first rose the dignity of the Christian name. Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia had already been filled, through thy preaching, with subjects of the Christian law; nevertheless, without for an instant desponding of the enterprise’s success or considering your advanced age and infirmities, you hastened to

place the trophy of Christ crucified upon the Roman Capitol, knowing well that there, by divine preordination, there awaited thee the honor of reigning over the Redeemer's kingdom, and at the same time sharing in his Passion." \*

St. Peter will pass the same spot on the Appian in twenty-five years afterwards, but under very different circumstances.†

\* Leo, "Serm., De Apost. Petro et Paulo."

† Although objections have been raised by religious fanatics to every doctrine professed by the Catholic Church, from the existence of God down to the ex-cathedra infallibility of the Pope, yet some of the objections are so absurd that in noticing them we sink from the dignity of historical criticism and the dictates of common sense; we are like aged travellers who pause on the roadside to contemplate the baby-houses that have been built by children. Amongst such objections, we undoubtedly place the miserable subterfuge of modern unbelief, in the assertion that St. Peter never came to Rome. It would be easier far to prove St. Augustine never came to England. Although learned men have condescended in later times to show up the sophisms by which this unblushing denial is supported, we will pass it by in the contempt it deserves; we will refer the reader who may wish to become more acquainted with its absurdity to the work of Dr. Pearson, Protestant Bishop of Chester, from whom we will quote but one overwhelming sentence. "That St. Peter was at Rome, is proved by Ignatius, disciple of St. John; from Papias, another disciple of the apostles; from St. Dionysius of Corinth, who might have seen St. John; from St. Irenæus, disciple of St. Polycarp, disciple of St. John; from Caius, a Roman priest who flourished in the first half of the second century; from

### III.

THE Mamertine was full of joy ; Martini-anus and Processus have become Christians and all the inmates of the various cells have been regenerated by the waters of the miraculous well. The news fled through the city ; the Christians flocked to the prison to kiss the chains of their beloved apostles, and the dungeons resounded with subdued hymns of praise. Tears of joy moistened their eyes, and blessings were invoked from heaven on

Clement of Alexandria, Origen's preceptor ; from Tertullian, who wrote his *Apology* before the year 200 ; from Origen, Cyprian, Lactantius, Eusebius, Athanasius, Epiphanius, Julian the Apostate, Augustine, Palladius, etc. . . . Hence it is wonderful—*mirum itaque*—that there could be found any to deny that Peter ever was at Rome.”—*Dissertationes de Serie et Successione Primorum Rom. Pont.*, chap. vii.

There was a public dispute on this question in Rome, a short time ago ; a challenge accepted by a few Roman priests more for literary amusement, and to show up the Evangelicals, than through fear the flimsy objections would have any weight with the people. The Evangelicals, finding they were getting the worst of the dispute, had prepared at any risk to prevent a second meeting. The priests, having heard that a disturbance was premeditated, prudently retired from the contest, and the foolish debate was abandoned.

Eusebius, “*Eccl. Hist.*,” book ii. ch. xiv. ; St. Cyril of Jerusalem, “*Catech.*” vi. p. 54 ; Irenæus, “*De Hær.*,” book i. ch. xx. ; Tertullian, “*De Anima*,” ch. xxxiv. ; Theodoret, “*Hær.*,” book i. ch. i. ; Justin M., “*Apol.*”

the noble guards, who, at the risk of their own lives, bade the apostles leave the prison and be free. The gates were thrown open, and the people implored with tears that they would fly; but Peter refused to fly like a coward, when the long-sighed-for triumph is within his grasp. Gathering his faithful flock near him, he addressed them in these words (as we read in the Acts of this apostle, quoted by the Bollandists, and supposed to be written by Pope Linus): “ My children, do you wish me to fly under the impulse of a base fear ; to turn my back on Rome, and seek safety in unknown lands beyond the sway of the tyrant, and live to see him revel in the decimation of my flock ? Is it becoming that I, to whom our celestial Commander has committed the banner of our spiritual warfare, and now grown old in the service, should show cowardice when the battle has commenced to rage around us ? It was not thus that Stephen, the first flower of the mysterious garden of the Church, fled for shelter in the hour of danger. No, children, I will stay and beard the tyrant in his wrath ! ” Yet history tells us the sobs of his people moved the resolution of the apostle. There

was the aged Senator Prudens, who offered him again the hospitality of his house; there was Petronilla, his daughter, and Prisca, and Lucina, and a number of his much-beloved flock, who lent the persuasive eloquence of their tears to the reason urged by the priests and deacons. Doubtless, being reminded that Almighty God sent an angel to take him out of prison on another occasion, he allowed himself to be persuaded it was even now the divine will he should be spared for further labors in spreading the Gospel.

According to St. Ambrose, at the dead of night, he left the gloomy dungeons of the Mamertine, and hastened towards the Capena gate.

He passed along through the silent and abandoned streets. On every side were still visible the traces of the burning of the city, so unjustly laid as a crime to his flock; the mighty Coliseum and the triumphal arches of Titus and Constantine were not yet in existence; but the golden house of the tyrant Cæsar, who wielded the sceptre of the Empire, was rising in costly magnificence on the slopes of the Palatine. The apostle passed unmolested through the

Capena gate, and entered on the Appian Way, which was even then beautiful in its tombs and its temples; not knowing, perhaps, whither he was going, and thinking what future generations would say of his cowardice. Still in doubt, and pouring forth his soul in prayer to God, he arrived at the temple of Mars.

Behold! a light brighter than the sun dazzles his eyes; in a luminous cloud he sees the well-known figure of Jesus; the Saviour is carrying his cross, and looks amiable and mild as in the days of his humanity; he approaches; the apostle, astounded, falls on his knees, and cried out: "O Lord! where art thou going?" The sweet voice of Jesus falls on his ears; slowly and solemnly he heard our Saviour say: "To Rome, to be crucified again." He then disappeared, leaving the impression of his feet on one of the slabs of the Appian Way.

Like one startled from a strange dream, Peter sprang to his feet in wonder, and, ashamed of his yielding, retraced his steps immediately to the city. He knew well the meaning of the vision; and, with a heart relieved from doubt, and cheered with the

prospect of immediate martyrdom, he pondered over the mysterious words. Jesus going to Rome!—that infamous city sunk in every enormity of vice and idolatry; harder than the stones of the streets, and more perfidious than the Jews that crucified him. To be crucified again! O ineffable mystery of love! O unfathomable ocean of forgiving goodness! Jesus ready to undergo again all the horrors of his crucifixion for the love of man! The thought melted the grateful heart of Peter; with tears of devotion and contrition flowing down their well-known track on his furrowed cheek, he arrived at the Mamertine to record to his flock the will of God as it was made known to him on the Appian Way.\*

\* Although there is some doubt amongst historians as to the exact time in which this vision was given to St. Peter, yet the fact is universally admitted. Some state that it was immediately after the fall of Simon Magus. The Christians knew the indignation of the tyrant would vent itself on the Apostles, and probably those who were "e domo Cæsaris" itself hastened with the information that the emperor had given orders for their seizure, and then St. Peter, at the exhortation and request of his flock, fled from the city, met our blessed Lord, returned, was seized, and cast into the Mamertine. This version may also be taken from St. Ambrose, who relates this vision of St. Peter in his epistle against Auxentius. The words of the holy doctor are:

There is a pious belief that, when our blessed Lord stood on the Appian Way in the apparition to St. Peter, he left the impression of his sacred feet on one of the stones of the road. A fac-simile of the impression is shown in the little church at the “Domine, quo vadis?” The original is sup-

“Peter, having conquered Simon, and spreading the precepts of God amongst the people, and teaching them to love chastity, excited the pagan mind against him; and since they wished to seize him, he was prayed by the Christians to conceal himself awhile; that he would reserve himself for the further instruction and encouragement of the people. Although desirous to suffer martyrdom, he yielded to the supplication of the people. What more? By night he passed the walls, and at the gate he saw Christ coming towards him as if entering the city. He said: ‘Lord, where art thou going?’ Christ replied: ‘I am going again to be crucified.’ Peter understood the divine reply to refer to his own cross. For Christ could not be crucified again, for, having cast off the flesh by his death, and being once dead, he lives, but lives to God. Peter therefore understood that Christ was to be crucified again in his servant. He willingly returned, and to the Christians seeking the reason (of his presence once more amongst them) he explained his vision, and, being immediately seized, he glorified Jesus by his cross.”

But all the Acts relating this vision place it after his confinement in the Mamertine. Baronius, St. Antonius, Cornelius à Lapide, Bosius, and nearly all modern historians accept it in this way as most probable. In alluding to the dispute, as to the time this extraordinary vision was given to St. Peter, we merely remind the reader that the fact itself bears some historical truth, and is therefore more interesting and instructive.

posed to be in the Church of St. Sebastian, further on.

Although the fact is not mentioned in the Acts that record the vision, yet it is given in several other documents worthy of note. In the Life of the apostles by Petrus de Natalibus, we find these words: “And when he had come to the gate, to the place which is now called S. Maria ad Passus, seeing Christ coming towards him, he said: ‘Lord, whither art thou going?’ who replied: ‘I am going to Rome, to be crucified again.’ He immediately disappeared, and *the impression of his feet on the marble is still to be seen.*” A constant tradition has supported this extraordinary relic, and even the little chapel erected to commemorate this vision of our blessed Lord has taken its name from this impression supposed to be left by him. In ancient documents it is styled at one time “S. Maria ad Passus”; in another, “S. Maria de Plantis”; and again, “S. Maria delle Palme.”

In the year 1624, a general visitation and enquiry into the churches and relics venerated in Rome was instituted by the Holy See. In the Acts of this visitation, we read: “There is a church here (the Appian Way) entitled

“Domine, quo vadis?” or Santa Maria de Plantis. It is so called because this is the place where our Lord Jesus Christ met St. Peter leaving the city, and replied that he was going to Rome to be crucified, and there also left the traces of his feet on the stones, which is now preserved amongst the relics in the Church of St. Sebastian, and in its place there is an exact copy covered with iron grating.” \*

Arringhi, an author of immense research, and whose work is of decided authority in matters of antiquity and tradition at Rome, treating of a passage in the Acts of St. Sebastian, in which allusion is made to the impression of footsteps and by error called *vestigia apostolorum*, in conclusion adds: “Porro apud omnes indubitatum est sacra-tissima Christi pedum vestigia præmemorato lapidi tunc temporis impressa fuisse, cum idem Dominus Apostolo Petro, qui Mamer-tino e carcere se proripuerat custodibus ipsis fugam patefacto ostio, suadentibus Via Appia, videndum sese obtulit.” †

\* Cancellieri, cap. xii. p. 69.

† Lib. iii. cap. xi.—It is undoubted amongst all that the most holy impression of the feet of Christ was left on that stone,

In quoting these references about this extraordinary relic, we do not profess to do more than to show the existence of a pious tradition. We have no authority for the relic beyond what we gather from this source.

## IV.

THERE is not around the venerable walls of Rome a spot more remarkable in pagan and ecclesiastical history than the little chapel of the “*Domine, quo vadis?*” A circle of a few hundred yards around this little capella was the theatre of some of the most interesting and remarkable events. It is memorable for the vision accorded to St. Peter; the scene of the martyrdom of several popes and other Christians, and some of the most remarkable miracles of the Christian era; its reminiscences are wrapped around the infancy of the Eternal City itself, following its varied history through centuries of war and bloodshed; at one time the scene of heroism and bravery; at another, dishonored with the excesses of the most degraded idolat-

when, his guards having opened the prison gates and persuaded him to fly, he met him on the Appian Way.

try. It is so intimately connected with the history of the Mamertine, it will be a pardonable digression to pause for a moment amidst its hallowed memories.

A short distance from the church popular opinion has for centuries placed the valley and fountain of Egeria, where Numa, "a princely hypocrite" as our Shakespeare would call him, seven hundred and sixteen years before Christ, was wont to repair for nocturnal conferences with this benignant goddess. It was this king gave the impulse of religious enthusiasm that ever afterwards twined with the history of the empire. He established the pontiffs' augurs, the salii, and other orders of the priesthood. By him the year was divided into twelve months, the auspicious were distinguished from the ill-omened days, and the ancilia, or sacred bucklers, devised as so many talismans of empire. He likewise instituted the two-faced Janus—pledge of peace and war; and the fire of Vesta, which like the stars of heaven was supposed to keep eternal vigil over the destinies of Rome, and to be tended by consecrated virgins. To render these institutions more sacred in the eyes of his rude subjects,

he pretended that they had been revealed to him by Egeria, the goddess of this fountain.

No art was spared by this monarch and those who succeeded him to impress the popular mind with religious awe; with a profound veneration for oaths, omens, and responses; with the conviction that religion was paramount to every other influence and interest; that nothing, however exalted, was exempt from its jurisdiction; and that nothing, either in peace or war, in private or public transactions, could be entered on or ratified legitimately but under its auspices. Every page in Roman history affords a proof of the complete success of this system. Those who have studied the causes of Roman greatness most profoundly are unanimous in assigning the first place to the strong religious reverence and enthusiasm by which the people were thus combined in one sacred league of patriotism which nothing could disorganize, vanquish, or resist, and by which the patricians, who ever kept this engine in their own hands, were able to wield and direct the resistless force of the democracy; so that Numa, rather than Romulus, deserves to

be regarded as the true founder of Roman greatness.

The secluded grotto with its ever-flowing fountain,\* moss-covered and green, where Numa planned the stupendous scheme of pagan worship, is still shown in this vicinity, and thus described by the inimitable Byron :

“ Egeria ! sweet creation of some heart  
Which found no mortal resting-place so fair  
As thine ideal breast ; whate’er thou art  
Or wert—a young Aurora of the air,  
The nympholepsy of some fond despair ;  
Or, it might be, a beauty of the earth,  
Who found a more than common votary there  
Too much adoring ; whatsoe’er thy birth,  
Thou wert a beautiful thought, and softly bodied  
forth.

“ The mosses of thy fountain still are sprinkled  
With thine Elysian water-drops ; the face  
of thy cave-guarded spring, with years un wrinkled,  
Reflects the meek-eyed genius of the place,  
Whose green, wild margin now no more erase  
Art’s works ; nor must the delicate waters sleep,  
Prisoned in marble ; bubbling from the base  
Of the cleft statue, with a gentle leap  
The rill runs o’er ; and round, fern, flowers, and  
ivy creep

\* Modern antiquarians cast well-founded doubts as to the identity of this fountain with that of Egeria. However, the place is remarkable and popular, and is much frequented on account of its antiquity. It lies in the valley, a few hundred yards behind the “ Domine, quo vadis ? ”

“ Fantastically tangled ; the green hills  
Are clothed with early blossoms ; through the  
grass  
The quick-eyed lizard rustles, and the bills  
Of summer-birds sing welcome as ye pass ;  
Flowers fresh in hue, and many in their class,  
Implore the pausing step, and with their dyes  
Dance in the soft breeze in a fairy mass ;  
The sweetness of the violet’s deep-blue eyes,  
Kissed by the breath of heaven, seems colored by  
its skies.”

Near this spot was fought a strange battle, on which the fate of a free kingdom was decided in an hour, and with the loss of five lives. From the roof of the church, in the direction of the classic tomb of Metella, you see a green plain ; there the memorable battle between the Horatii and Curatii was fought. Martial writes :

“ Capena grandis porta qua pluit gutta,  
Prygiumque matris almo qua lavat ferrum,  
Horatiorum qua viret sacer campus,  
Et qua pusilli servet Herculis fanum.”

The history of this scene, which passed several centuries before the Christian era, proposes to the boasted progress of our days the power of settling national disputes by bloodless battles. If the forbearance and heroic conduct of the rude, idolatrous nations that

assembled on this plain to settle their disputes were adopted as the principle of battle amongst modern nations, how much evil would be spared to man! The widow's tears and ophan's cry, the burnt cities, and desolated land, and awful ruin that dog the bloody track of war, would not then be the darkest page in the list of human sorrows.

On a plain in sight, Coriolanus had cast his tents, and here transpired that scene of maternal triumphal and filial affection that saved Rome from the revenge of her bravest and greatest general. A temple, dedicated to "Fortuna Feminile," commemorated the event, and was for centuries one of the ornaments and monuments that lined the Appian at this spot.

Here Milo slew Clodius, whose defence gave birth to that sublime oration of the immortal Cicero. "Had you spoken as you have written," wrote the exiled Milo, "I would not now be condemned to eat the fish of Marseilles."

A few yards from the "Domine, quo vadis?" is the famous Almo stream of which Ovid sings:

“Est locus in Tiberim qua lubricus influit Almo.  
Et magno nomen perdit in amne minor,  
Illic purpurea canus cum veste sacerdos,  
Almonis Dominam sacra que lavit aquis.”

The allusion in the last line refers to a remarkable pagan ceremony that took place every year on the 17th of March at the little bridge of the Almo on the Appian Way. This day was sacred to Cybele, the mother of all the gods! They carried the statue of the goddess from her temple on the Palatine with great pomp and ceremony to this spot. The people assembled in numbers and brought flowers and fruits, dressed in holiday attire, each bearing the insignia of position or title; they danced and shouted the whole way, whilst some recited for their friends original verses in honor of the god that pleased him most. The pagan priests, called Galfi, were entrusted with the care of this ceremony; they were old and venerable men, gorgeously dressed in purple and gold, who carried the statue in turn, and walked barefooted the whole way. And what was the end of all this pomp and display? They washed the mother of all the gods in the stream, and then returned to the city.

St. Augustine describes this ceremony in his "City of God," and, filled with holy indignation, cries out: "Quæ sunt sacrilegia si illa sacra; aut quæ inquinatio si illa lavatio?" \*

Tertullian, also, in his fourth "Apology," writes thus: "Lavatio Deum matris est hodie; sordescunt enim Dii et ad sordes eluendas lavantibus aquis opus est atque adjunctis cirenis perifricione."

Not more absurd was the procession of the Manual Stone, which was left by the Temple of Mars, and carried into the city in time of great drought. A similar procession was formed. They passed around the Capitol, and then returned with the stone, leaving it in its place till required for another of these absurd exhibitions.

Amongst the temples around this spot, we notice one entitled "To the Goddess of the Tempest." The idea is a sublime one, but what sort of being she appeared to the ancients, we are at a loss to conjecture. We can fancy this amiable queen of the storms sitting on a throne of luminous clouds near the setting sun, holding court with the winds

\* "What are sacrileges if those things be sacred; what is defilement if that be a purification?"—Lib. ii. cap. iv.

that are to sweep the deep. Invoked from some frail bark struggling for existence, she divides the storm and gives a free channel to the object of her protection. Such was the idea of M. Marcellus, who erected this temple; he was saved from a watery grave in a storm, and in gratitude built a superb monument to the Goddess of the Tempest. The Church of St. Sebastian now stands on the site of this temple.

Ovid writes of this temple:

“Lux eadem Marti eadem facta est quam prospicit  
extra  
Appositum tectæ Porta Capena Viæ,  
Te quoque tempestas meritum deluibra fatemur  
Cum pene est Corsis obruta classis aquis.”

Here, also, were the temples of Honor and Virtue, ideas of something lovely and beautiful far away in the mysterious entity of the spiritual world; their existence proves there is something in the human heart, no matter how depraved or lost in the cloud of superstition, that makes it yearn for its true source of happiness; but honor and virtue amongst the pagans were but brilliant moral creations, which resemble those beautiful porticos and palaces that rise in the ice-bound polar

seas under the cold ray that gilds their surface ; they glisten with all the brightness of the diamond, while in reality they are nothing but—ice !

The temple of Ridiculus, or Ridicule, which stood near this spot on the Appian, was a curious monument to commemorate the retreat of Hannibal from the walls of Rome. It was the pride of a defeated people, of a nation in the throes of dissolution, erected this temple to declare that the enemy who dared to aspire to the possession of the Roman capital was a votary of the god who loves the ridiculous. It was the same spirit that made them set up for auction in the Forum the very field on which Hannibal had cast his camp on the banks of the Anio. Under the policy of Fabius, “qui cunctando restituit,” and Scipio, who brought the tide of war to the gates of Carthage, Hannibal was recalled, when he was almost about to seize the prize for which he was seventeen years fighting. They say it was on this spot he took his last look at the city, and flung his javelin and his curse towards the walls of Rome. “Ridiculi Fanum,” writes Sextus Pompeius, “extra portam Capenam fuit quia

accedens ad urbem Hannibal *ex eo loco* redierit  
quibusdam perterritis visis.”

The most celebrated of these temples on the Appian Way, erected to the gods of paganism, was that erected by Silla about eighty years before the Christian era, and dedicated to Mars. This was a sumptuous edifice, built on one hundred columns of marble, and adorned with all the extravagance and splendor so recklessly lavished on the buildings of those days. Allusion has been made to this splendid temple by several poets. Cicero writes: “Roma et maxime Appia ad Martis mira proluvies.”\* And Livy relates with a silly air of credulity how two consuls, Cn. Servilius and Flaminius, saw the statue of the god placed in this temple perspire profusely, so that large drops of perspiration fell to the ground.†

The exact position of this temple is somewhat disputed, but we take the authority of the most ancient antiquarians, as also Arringhi and Panciroli, in placing it exactly where the little Church of the “*Domine, quo vadis?*” now stands. Piazza writes thus: “Famoso egli è nell’ Iсторie Ecclesiastiche e Gentili

\* Epis. xxiii. lib. iv.

† Livy, decad. i. lib. vii.

questo sito ; dove già convengono gli Antiquari chè fosse il celebre tempio di Marte Gradivo, sostenuto da cento colonne, ove il Senato Romano dava udienza a gli ambasciatori di gente nemica ; e perchè da Marte riconoscevano tutte le vittorie ottenute, cinsero di molte palme il tempio." \*

Therefore, some of the greatest and most interesting miracles recorded in the Acts of the Martyrs took place at this spot. Thrice it was struck by the lightning of heaven, at the prayers of the holy pontiffs, Cornelius, Stephen, and Sixtus. Almost under the shadow of its stately palm-trees, those pontiffs and a great number of Christians were executed. They were sent from the city to offer sacrifice to the god Mars ; so that, if they refused, they might be put to death on the spot, as it was the custom to have malefactors executed outside the walls. We will glance at a few thrilling anecdotes that will

\* " This place is famous in ecclesiastical and gentile histories; where all antiquarians agree was the celebrated temple of Mars Gradivus, supported on a hundred columns of marble; where the Roman Senate used to give audience to the ambassadors of hostile nations, and because from Mars they recognized all their victories they surrounded the temple with many palm-trees."—Piazza, " Hieromenia," p. 146.

instruct and amuse, and at the same time prove our assertion that the little Church of the “*Domine, quo vadis?*” has some strange and hallowed reminiscences around it.

During the dreadful persecution that raged over the Church, we find three of the successors of St. Peter were martyred either on the spot where now stands the Church of the “*Domine, quo vadis?*” or close to it. In the Acts of the Martyrs, the temple of Mars is frequently mentioned; the Christians were brought here to sacrifice, and, refusing, were invariably martyred. Cornelius with twenty-one others was martyred in the very vestibule of the temple. Also the little Lucilla, the daughter of Nemesius. On a little hill a few yards apart were martyred Sixtus and his companions, Nemesius Tarsicius, and in the Catacombs hard by the holy Pope Stephen. The following passages from the Acts of the Martyrs speak for themselves:

“Cerealis, to whose care Cornelius was committed, asked the holy Pope to come into his house and visit his wife, whose name was Sallustia, lying fifteen years a paralytic. Cornelius came to his house, bringing with him two priests and an acolyte. Having en-

tered the sick-room, he prayed thus: ‘Lord God, creator of everything visible and invisible, who deignest to come to us sinners to save us, raise this afflicted servant and show her thy mercy, as thou hast given sight to the blind to recognize thy glory.’

“Approaching the couch, and holding the hand of Sallustia, he said, ‘In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ of Nazareth, arise and stand on thy feet,’ who immediately arose, crying out, ‘Truly Christ is God, and the Son of God!’ Then she said to Cornelius, ‘I conjure thee by Christ to baptize me.’ And hastening they brought a vessel of water to him. The soldiers, likewise, who were under Cerealis, seeing this miracle, cast themselves at the feet of the Pope and begged to be baptized. Cornelius, seeing the hand of God in all this, baptized them, and offered for them the Sacrifice of Praise, and they partook of the body and blood of Christ. The emperor, hearing what had happened, sent and had the whole house of Cerealis seized, together with the soldiers that were baptized, and they were brought with the blessed Cornelius to offer sacrifice to the gods. They were conducted outside the

walls through the Appian gate to the temple of Mars; but they, refusing to sacrifice, and spitting at the temple, were beheaded in the vestibule of the temple, with the holy Pope, to the number of twenty-one; with them were martyred Cerealis and his wife Sallustia, on the 18th calends of October.”

Two years after, we find another strange event recorded in the Acts of Pope Stephen: “Then the blessed Stephen, having been led out of the city on the Via Appia, when he had come to the temple of Mars, he said, lifting his eyes to heaven: ‘Lord God and Father, who didst destroy the tower of confusion at Babylon, destroy this place, in which the devil deludes the people with superstition.’ It then began to thunder, and lightning in flashes struck the temple, which fell in part; and, the soldiers having fled, Stephen, who remained alone, went with his attendant priests and deacons to the neighboring cemetery of Lucina,\* where he encouraged the Christians to martyrdom by many exhortations. After this he offered sacrifice to the Omnipotent God. The soldiers who were sent in pursuit found him in

\* St. Callistus.

the act of celebrating the holy sacrifice ; but, without being terrified, he continued intrepidly to pursue the mysteries he had commenced, until they struck off his head, as he sat in the pontifical chair before the altar, on the fourth nones of August. Great was the lamentation of the Christians at being deprived of so great a pastor, and they interred his body, with the chair drenched with his blood, in the same crypt, in the place called the cemetery of Callistus.\*

The next day near this spot, on the Appian Way, took place one of the most glorious martyrdoms we have on record, that of the youth Tarsicius, who died in defence of the Blessed Sacrament.

He was commissioned to carry the sacred particles to some sick person in the city. On his way he met some pagan soldiers, who, noticing he carried something under his mantle, wished through curiosity to know what he had concealed. The brave youth resisted, and the more he struggled the more increased their curiosity and determination to see his treasure. With sticks and stones they ill-treated the noble youth until they killed

\* See Baronius, an. 260.

him, then, opening his hands and garments, behold! there was nothing. The Blessed Sacrament had disappeared. Leaving his dead body on the road, they fled in terror.\*

How terrible were those days when an unoffending youth might be murdered for the gratification of a sacrilegious curiosity! Pope Damasus commemorates this brave youth in the following beautiful lines:

“ Par meritum quicunque legis  
Cognosce duorum  
Quis Damasus Rector titulos  
Post præmia reddit.  
Judaicus populus Stephanum  
Meliora monentem  
Perculerat saxis, tulerat  
Qui ex hoste trophæum  
Martyrium, primus rapuit  
Levita fidelis  
Tarsicum sancti Christi  
Sacramenta gerentem,  
Cum male sanus manus peteret  
Vulgare profanis,

\* “ At ille indignum judicans porcis prodere margaritas ne-  
quaquam voluit detegere sacrosancta mysteria, quem fustibus  
et lapidibus tamdiu mactaverunt quousque exhilaret spiritum;  
revolutoque ejus exanime corpore nihil potuerunt in ejus mani-  
bus vestimentisque reperiri sacrilegi discussores; relictoque  
ejus corpore cum terrore fugerunt.”—At the end of the Acts of  
St. Stephen, Bollandists.

Ipse animam potius voluit  
Dimittere cæsus,  
Prodere quam canibus rabidis  
Cœlestia membra.”\*

The holy Pope Sixtus, Palmatius, and Tertullinus were also executed here for the faith, but as they were also victims of the Mamertine we reserve them for special notice.

## V.

THERE are none of the minor rites so well known amongst Catholics as the use of Holy Water. It is possible we can trace its origin and use to this spot on the Appian Way. Holy Water was introduced by Pope Alexander in the third century, from a peculiar pagan custom, connected with a fountain of Mercury erected close to the temple of Mars. The Romans came here in great numbers and in procession on the fifteenth of May, every year, and, sprinkling themselves with laurel branches with the water of this fountain, believed they thereby gained pardon for sins of perjury and injustice.†

\* Arringhi, lib. iii. cap. xi.

† Piazza, “Emerologio Sacro”; also Martinelli, Donatus, and others.

This is an important and strange fact. It is the only instance we have in history that pagans sought forgiveness for sins. Its striking analogy to the Catholic use of Holy Water has led some writers to believe the latter had its origin in the pagan custom.

Although we have no historical proof of the transition here suggested, we see no grounds for a charge in admitting a pagan origin to a Christian custom. All things have been made for the glory of God. If they have been abused, it is conformable to reason to bring them back to their original purpose. The sun, moon, and trees have been worshipped as pagan deities; there are at least forty churches in Rome built on the ruins of pagan temples; there are convents, where holy and chosen souls consecrate themselves to God with the vow of virginity, that were erected from the lupanars of the ancient baths. Are they all to be condemned as unfit any longer to give glory to God because once desecrated by the folly of paganism? Then should the cross cease to be the emblem of our hopes, the ornament of our faith, because once the punishment of crime; and the gold of idols cast away as cursed and

worthless metal. But it was the prudence of the Catholic Church in the commencement to purify rather than annihilate the customs of paganism, not to tear them suddenly from practices that usage had endeared, but rather to change the motive of the celebration, and to consecrate to the glory of God what was heretofore given to superstitious and idolatrous worship. Thus, for the processions of the pagans, where they carried the statues of their false gods, the Church had the crucifix, or an image of the Blessed Virgin, or some saint: the games in honor of the gods were turned into feasts in honor of the martyrs. In the first ages, the habits of the people acquired in infancy and the local customs formed immense obstacles to the progress of the faith; but, under the prudence of the apostles and their sainted successors, everything that was lawful was conceded to the national prejudice; what could not be well abolished was purified and preserved; thus the peculiar superstitions of every people under the sun were changed and sanctified, calmly and stealthily cast into the groove of Catholic thought. The majestic oaks which lent their shade to the idolatrous ceremonies

of paganism were not felled, but in the hollow of their trunks which the rain had excavated was placed the image of some saint. A cross surmounted the Druidical fountain, and the people naturally invoked the intercession of a martyr where before they adored the genius of the fountain or the grove. The instructions of Gregory the Great are a masterpiece of prudence. “Tell Augustine,” writes the aged Pontiff, “the result of my long reflections on the conversion of the English. We must not destroy the temples of their idols, but only the idols themselves; bless the enclosure, purify it, construct altars, and enrich them with relics. These temples are justly taken from the service of demons and transferred to that of the true God. Then the people, seeing their temples respected, will be the better disposed to abjure their ancient errors, and, acknowledging the true God, will continue to frequent the accustomed places. I am informed they are in the habit of immolating oxen in honor of their gods; some change must be made in these solemnities. On the anniversary day of the consecration of a church or the birth of a martyr, let tents be made with the

branches of trees that are around the ancient temples now become the houses of the true God ; and let feasts be celebrated of a religious character, that the people may no longer immolate their oxen to the demons, but to the true God, and thus render thanks to the divine Dispenser of all gifts for the blessings they enjoy. In thus condescending somewhat to them we shall render them more docile to the interior joys of religion, and it would be impossible to destroy their ancient customs all at once. If you wish to gain a lofty summit, you must mount by successive and slow steps, and not defeat your purpose by too adventurous leaps.” \*

## VI.

WE may yet quote from a wider and darker page of history, and give reminiscences of a more thrilling character, wrapping a halo of deeper veneration around the “ Domine, quo vadis ? ” Here are the Catacombs of St. Callistus !

\* “ Fleurs de Ceil,” Orsini, p. 114. “ Letters of Pope Gregory to Melitus, Saxon missionary.”

The little church stands over the very heart of these catacombs. What volumes could we not fill with the touching records of those homes of the martyred dead! On a slab that has been placed at the entrance of these catacombs, about two hundred years ago, we read that grace can be obtained from God, “through merits of one hundred and seventy-four thousand martyrs, with forty-six popes, who are here buried in peace.” \*

Can any other place on earth boast of such a treasure? These catacombs are not only the largest, but the most remarkable about Rome. They extend through a circuit of six or seven miles, “branching out into such an infinity of passages,” says Bosio, who spent thirty years in the study of them, “and broken and subdivided into what may be termed streets and lanes, winding about and crossing and recrossing one another, that a perfect labyrinth is formed, and that of such immensity that those by whom they have

\* “Per merita gloriosa centum septuaginta quatuor millium Sanctorum Martyrum una cum quadraginta sex summis pontificibus quorum ibi corpora in pace sépulta sunt.”—From inscriptions on one of the slabs at the entrance of the Catacombs of St. Sebastian. The Catacombs of St. Sebastian were considered part of those of St. Callistus when this slab was erected.

been explored compare them not to one but to many cities." \*

The original excavations were extended by the Christians so as to be able to escape from one catacomb to another; they burrowed down, still forming catacomb below catacomb, like the successive stages or stories of a house, as if driven by persecution into the very bowels of the earth. Those dreary crypts became for the Christians not only their cemeteries, but their churches, and—we shudder in sympathy—their very dwellings. Here they received instruction, heard the Gospel preached, sang the divine office, and participated in the dread sacrifice of the

\* Bosio died before he completed his work. His MSS. were placed in the hands of Severano by Cardinal Barberini, librarian of the Vatican. He added some observations of his own, but still left the work incomplete; it was finally completed and published by Arringhi in two splendid volumes, entitled "Roma Sotteranea." It is a work of immense treasure; the plates alone are invaluable—they are executed by a master-hand, and are perfect fac-similes of paintings, sarcophagi, ampulli, and other relics of the catacombs, no longer to be seen in the originals, the passages leading to them being closed to avoid the imminent danger to human life they afforded. It is said that a whole division of students were thus lost in those catacombs. The guide having missed his way, each new turn cast them deeper into the maze of the labyrinth, and they never appeared again amongst the living. See Boldetti also Pellicia.

altar, and, as the only place safe from the fury of persecution that raged in the world above, they ate, slept, and lived, and even children were born, in their cold, gloomy chambers. “Pope Liberius *dwell* about three miles from the city,” says Anastasius, “in the cemetery of Novella and near to that of Ostrianus, where Peter used to baptize.”

“While at Rome in my boyhood,” says St. Jerome, “I used often of a Sunday go about with my school-fellows visiting the tombs of the apostles and the martyrs, frequently entering crypt after crypt, having the relics of the dead on either side of the long, dark galleries, so dismal as to force that saying of the prophet on one’s memory, ‘They shall go down alive into the region of death;’ the few foramens, or air-holes, here and there overhead only making darkness visible, and reminding you of Virgil’s line:

‘*Horror ubique animos simul ipsa silentia terrent.*’”

The cruelty and injustice of the persecutors, who forced the poor Christians “to go down alive into the region of death,” made them even draw from the catacombs a deep-

er aversion against them, and gave additional zest to the cry for their extermination. The sand-pits, sanctified by the Christians, were filled to the pagan mind with revolting recollections. They were long the haunts of the murderer, the malefactor, and evildoer—scenes of many a dark treason against life and innocence—damp, fetid, and dismal, having their entrances choked up with every filth, and not unfrequently with the skeletons and rotting carcasses of slaves, or the hapless victims of lawless violence; and, consequently, when the Christians took possession of them, purified them, and made them cemeteries, their impious slanderers called them “a crew of conspirators, fond of darkness, lurking in dens, and afraid of the light.”

This accusation rolled on the stream of time to the ears of the eloquent Basil. In a burst of holy indignation he treats it thus: “‘Et tenebrosa et lucifugax natio !’—‘ Furtive and afraid of the light !’ Do they mean Christianity ? That mysterious emanation from the ‘splendor of the Father,’ whose word caused effulgence to burst forth from darkness, and who has flung its lustrous beauty over all that he has created, from

the crested billow, enamelled with the rainbow brilliancy, to the heavens that tell his glory in hymns of radiance—why should this celestial visitant hold in abhorrence or apprehension that bright and glowing benediction, which it was her own chief errand to bring to those who ‘sat in darkness’?”

## VII.

### DISCOVERIES OF DE ROSSI.

FOR ten centuries the Catacombs of St. Calistus were forgotten; it was a popular opinion that they were but a continuation of those of St. Sebastian, or *ad Catacumbas*, further on the Appian Way; but the investigations made by De Rossi have led him to believe they are perfectly distinct. The discoveries made by De Rossi throw light on some important questions of history. His account of how he first found them is very interesting.

In 1849, he chanced to find in the cellar of a vineyard on the Via Appia, about a quarter of a mile nearer to Rome than the Catacombs of St. Sebastian, a fragment of

a monumental stone, having on it the upper part of the letter R, followed by the complete letters NELIUS . MARTYR. With one of those conjectures in which he is so happy—if conjectures they can be called, when we take into account how thoroughly versed he is in the lore of his science—he divined it to belong to the grave of St. Cornelius, Pope, and Martyr of the third century. He forthwith induced Pius IX. to purchase the vineyard, and set to work diligently with his excavations. Soon he came across the other half of the same slab lying at the foot of the grave to which it belonged. He could now read, “Cornelius Martyr,” with the affix “EP” inscribed underneath. This was enough to convince him that he had found the cemetery of St. Callistus; for he knew from his guides—the ancient records and writings of the Fathers—that the tomb of St. Cornelius was hard by. Not far off he found a small piece of stone, evidently part of an inscription put up by Pope Damasus, the great adorner of the catacombs of the fourth century, for it consisted of the letter H three times repeated one above the other, the characters being those known to archæolo-

gists as the Damasine. In course of time all the fragments of the slab were collected, but so small were the pieces that it looked like one of those puzzles given in pieces to children, that they might exercise their ingenuity in putting each fragment into its own place; but De Rossi succeeded, and the inscription of the gifted Pontiff read thus:

“ Hic congesta jacent quæris si turba piorum,  
Corpora Sanctorum retinent veneranda sepulchra,  
Sublimes animas rapuit sibi regia cœli,  
Hic comites Xysti portant qui ex hoste tropæa,  
Hic numerus procerum servat qui altaria Christi,  
Hic confessores sancti quos Græcia misit,  
Hic juvenes puerique senes castique nepotes,  
Quis mage virginum placuit retinere pudorem,  
Hic fateor Damasus volui mea condere membra,  
Sed cineres timui Sanctos vexare piorum.”

But the most important and interesting discovery made by De Rossi was that in which he has proved the substantial accuracy of the history of St. Cecilia. The criticisms of the last century consigned the Acts of this illustrious virgin martyr to the regions of fable, but the valuable result of recent discovery is a striking proof of what mistakes we may make by too hastily condemning the records of antiquity because of apparent in-

consistencies, and how much reliance after all may be placed upon ecclesiastical traditions which the incredulous characterize as idle legends elevated to the standard of history.

Cecilia was a girl of high birth, brought up from her infancy in the Christian religion. She had consecrated her virginity to God, but, when bidden to unite herself in marriage with an amiable and wealthy young patrician named Valerian, she did not refuse, having received a divine intimation to obey the parental commands, and assuring her, at the same time, that both she and her spouse should retain their virginity and shed their blood for the faith. The following passage from the Acts relative to the conversion of Valerian brings us back once more to a scene that passed near the “Domine, quo vadis?”

Cecilia spent her time in prayer and fasting, not yet knowing how she should escape her engagement with Valerian. She even wore a hair-cloth under the rich and golden garments which her parents obliged her to wear on account of her noble position.\* Full

\* “Cecilia autem in carne induita cilicio, extrinsecus aureis  
induta erat vestibus.”—*Acts*, Surius, November 22.

of confidence in God, she nevertheless deferred from time to time to inform Valerian of her desire to live chaste, and of the vow she had offered to Heaven. At length the evening before the wedding-day arrived. Great preparations were made for the festivities; musicians were gathering; bouquets of flowers, blooming and fragrant, were sent with congratulations from admiring friends; wedding gifts and costly ornaments, which the holy virgin despised. Like a dove trembling in its cote when the hawk is near, Cecilia retired to her room full of trepidation and fear; and earnestly prayed that God would make known his will. She received an answer; her angel guardian was near, and bade her how to act.

Night came on. A solemn stillness had now taken the place of the noise and bustle of the household; the guests had retired to rest, amongst them Valerian, who longed in bright anticipation for the dawn of the morrow. Cecilia stole to his room. Having called Valerian, she spoke to him thus: “Dearest and sweetest youth! I have a secret to tell you, but you must swear you wont divulge it.”\*

\* “Nox venit in qua cum suo sponso in separato cubiculo

Valerian promised on oath to keep the secret.

Then she said to him, “I wish you to know I have an angel of God for a friend, who protects my body with the greatest care. If he suspected in the least that you had an impure love towards me, he would be so enraged that he would soon destroy the flower of your youth; but, if he sees you love me with a simple and chaste love, and that you will let me preserve my virginity, then he will love you as he loves me, and will show his power.”

Hearing this, Valerian, frightened and at the same time moved by grace (*Dei nutu*), said: “If you wish, my dearest, that I should believe all this, show me the angel, and, if I find him to be indeed an angel, I shall do whatever you say; but, if I find you love another man, I will slay both you and him with my sword.”\*

Cecilia replied: “My dear Valerian, if you

*quietem noctu et silentium sic eum est allocuta: ‘Carissime et dulcissime adolescens, habeo arcana,’ etc. ‘Volo te scire me angelum Dei habere amicum,’ etc.—*Acts, Surius, Nov. 22.**

\*“*Si vis, carissima, ut credam iis quæ dicis, ostende mihi ipsum angelum, et si intellexero eum esse verum angelum, faciam quæ hortaris,*” etc.

will abide by my advice, and promise to be regenerated in the waters of baptism, and believe in God the Father, and his Son Jesus Christ, you will be able to see the angel.”

“And who will purify me, that I may see him?” asked Valerian.

“There is an old man in a certain place,” replied the holy virgin, with an animated and cheerful tone, “who knows well how to purify, so that you may see the angel.”

“And where is he?”

“Well, I will tell you. Go to the third mile-stone on the Appian Way.\* You will see some poor persons sitting there, and begging alms from the passers-by. These poor people are dear to me, and know my secret.† When you see them, give them my benediction, and say, ‘Cecilia sent me to you, that you may show me where the holy old man named Urban lives, for I have a message for him’; and when you see Urban, tell him all that I have told you, and, when he will have purified you, put on your best clothes, and come into this room, and you

\*The third mile-stone is about half a mile beyond the “*Domine, quo vadis?*”

†“*Qui quidem sunt mei arcani participes.*”

will see the angel,\* who will become your friend, and will do for you anything you ask him."

Valerian went as he was directed by the holy virgin. He found the poor people on the Appian Way, near the temple of Mars. Having given a generous alms, he called one of them aside, and gave him the message from Cecilia. He was conducted down the catacombs, and brought into the presence of Urban. He was instructed and baptized, and, when he returned, he saw the beautiful angel by the side of Cecilia. In turn he converted his brother Tiburtius, whom he brought with him to these catacombs to Urban. The martyrdom of the brothers followed quickly on their conversion, and such was the constancy they showed in fearlessly accepting death for the faith that the presiding officer and some of the attendants were won to the truth, and went with them to receive the martyr's palm.

Cecilia was suffered to live a while longer. We know not whether it was because her noble rank and youthful beauty made it in-

\* "Indue te indumentis novis et splendidis"—literally, "put on new and splendid garments."

vidious to take away her life, or because the prefect Almachius had some hopes of shaking her constancy. At length he resolved that she should be put to death secretly by suffocation, so they locked her in her bathroom, which was heated to an unusual temperature, every aperture being closed up, and there they left her for a day and a night. When the official sent by the prefect visited her after this lapse of time, to his surprise the bloom had not faded from her cheeks, nor had the vigor departed from her limbs; returning with the wonderful tidings, he received orders to despatch her instantly with the sword. Three times he struck, but either pity or admiration, or else the divine power, unnerved his arm, for the head yet remained unsevered from the trunk. It was forbidden by the Roman law to strike oftener than thrice, so he departed, leaving her in this state, the blood welling forth from the wound, and bathing her in its stream. The faithful rushed into the room to receive her last words, and to gather up the hallowed stream of blood. They found her lying peacefully on the ground, and, when they drew near to staunch the wound, she spoke

words of comfort and advice to each. So she remained for three days, till Pope Urban came to bid her a last farewell; then, raising her head, she told him with a smile how she had prayed to live till he came, that she might resign into his hands, in keeping for God's poor, the house and grounds which belonged to her, and, these words said, her head fell gently back and she expired. They carried her corpse without disturbing the peaceful position in which she lay to the Catacombs of St. Callistus, and there, close to the vault where the Vicars of Jesus Christ slept in peace, this noble virgin martyr was laid to rest in a cypress-tree coffin.

Several centuries passed by, and Pope Paschal I. succeeded to the Pontificate. In the first year of his reign, he translated into the different churches of Rome the relics of many martyrs, principally from the Catacombs of St. Callistus, whence twenty-eight cart-loads of relics were brought to the Pantheon,\* and the relics of the Popes to St. Peter's. This Pope wished also to remove the relics of St. Cecilia, but was unable to find them amidst the ruins that blocked up

\* See Panciroli, "Sta. Maria della Rotonda."

the whole place, and was compelled to desist from his design. Four years afterwards he had a dream, in which St. Cecilia appeared to him, and told him that, when he was removing the relics of the Popes, she was so near to him that they might have held a conversation together. Accordingly, he renewed the search, found the body in the place specified, “fresh and perfect as when it was first laid in the tomb, and clad with rich garments mixed with gold, with linen cloths stained with blood rolled up at her feet, lying in a cypress coffin.” It is he himself who gives this account. He adds that he covered the body with silk, spread over it a covering of gauze, laid it in a white marble sarcophagus, and placed it beneath the altar in the church of St. Cecilia in Trastevere.

Eight hundred years afterwards, that is, in the year 1599, Cardinal Sfrondati, of the title of St. Cecilia, was restoring his church, and, whilst the laborers were digging for foundations beneath the high altar, they came upon two marble sarcophagi. In the presence of competent witnesses one of them was opened; it was found to contain a coffin of cypress wood. The cardinal himself drew

back the coffin-lid. First appeared the precious lining and silk gauze, with which Paschal had covered the body eight centuries before. Its color had faded, but the fabric was still entire, and through the transparent folds could be seen the shining gold of the robes in which the body of the martyr herself was clothed. After pausing for a few moments, the cardinal gently removed this silken covering, and the virgin form of St. Cecilia appeared in the very same attitude in which she had breathed her last on the pavement of the house in which the spectators were then standing, and which neither Urban nor Paschal had ventured to disturb. She lay clothed in her robes of golden tissue, on which were still visible the glorious stains of her blood, and at her feet were the linen cloths mentioned by Pope Paschal and his biographer. Lying on her right side, with her arms extended in front of her body, she looked like one in deep sleep. Her head, in a singularly touching manner, was turned round towards the bottom of the coffin, her knees slightly bent and drawn together. The body was perfectly incorrupt, and by a special miracle retained, after more than

thirteen hundred years, all its grace and modesty, and recalled with the most truthful exactness Cecilia breathing forth her soul on the pavement of her bath-room.

A more signal vindication of the Church's traditions, a more consoling spectacle for a devout Catholic mourning over the schisms and heresies of these miserable times, a more striking commentary, could scarcely be found on the divine promise: “The Lord keepeth all the bones of his servants; he will not lose one of them.” The body was exposed for veneration for the space of three or four weeks, during which time Maderna made his celebrated statue of it, and then it was reclosed. The marble statue was placed beneath the high altar which the cardinal built to celebrate the event.\* The difficulty, moreover, about the Acts of this martyr vanishes when we erase the word Pope before the name of Urban. There was no Pope of this name in the time of Commodus and Aurelius. However, Rossi has discovered there was a St. Urban, Bishop and Martyr, buried in the same crypt with Pope Urban, who died fifty years after

\* Rossi, page 267. Panciroli, Martinelli, etc.

St. Cecilia. Hence the error. The compiler of the Acts as we now have them, seeing the tomb of St. Cecilia to be close to that of St. Urban the Pope, and finding mention of St. Urban in the documents from which he was compiling, confounded the one name with the other. Hence the whole story is cleared from contradiction. As far as we have seen, the adverse criticisms against Rossi's theory are weak. It must be remembered, moreover, that the French writers, who have so profoundly treated of the Acts and legends of St. Cecilia, had not the advantage of seeing and studying for themselves the crypts lately discovered in the Catacombs of St. Callistus.\*

It is interesting to consider how the records of the faith of the first ages of Christianity, written in marble and sealed with blood, have been deciphered by the research of modern centuries, to check the ramblings of misguided reason, and strengthen the wavering steps of faith by the incontestable character of their testimony. In this age of scepticism.

\* An interesting pamphlet has been published lately on this subject in Rome, by an English Jesuit. It is entitled "Holy Places."

the lessons read in the catacombs are wonder-working. Thousands who have been wandering in the dark way, led on by the glimmering lamp of human reason, are daily enlightened into truth by the torchlight that guides through those labyrinthine passages. There he who ventures may read the consoling doctrine of the forgiveness of sins and the real presence in the most holy Sacrament; from a thousand monumental slabs, he is told of the privilege of intercessory prayer; over the cryptal altar he may find the Madonna and child, rudely painted in faded colors, but there as truly as we see them to-day in all the magnificence of wealth and art over the altars of our modern cathedrals.

There are incredulous men who, unable to resist the overwhelming weight of sacred tradition, would have us believe that those sacred memorials of the past, the Acts of the martyrs and the miracles wrought at their tombs, are but dreams of enthusiasts, huge fabrications invented for a pious fraud.\* If the teachings of the Fathers of the Reformation

\* A certain English Protestant writer has said the catacombs are a huge lie; that in the Middle Ages the monks got into them, and painted and wrote the different testimonies that are so crushing against modern heresy.

tion be true, the catacombs become still more terrible in their historic horrors; their sleeping dead, whose crimsoned tombs tell of awful suffering, have been the victims of a gigantic imposition—an imposition, too, sanctioned by the miracles of the Most High.

What explanation can we give to the conduct of some modern writers, who not only reject the telling consequences of the catacombs as records of the early faith of Christianity, but cast a slur of ridicule on the veneration Catholics bear to those venerable archives of the past? There is not a nation or an individual but has not instinctively a reverence for the things of the past. The Romans loved the first bridge cast across the Tiber; long after stone arches had spanned the torrent, they so revered the dilapidated wooden structure that they handed it to the custody of the priests of the temple; hence we have the word *pontiff*, from the Latin word *pons*, a bridge. No wealth would purchase the antique furniture and mouldy pictures that adorn the chambers of the mediæval castles of Europe; the lock of hair, the photograph of a friend, and the last mementos of severed love are pressed to the bosom with respect.

At our antipodes some poor Irish exile will reverently close in his prayer-book a blossom from the hawthorn bush that grew near his cabin door. Is this universal respect for the mementos of the past to be cried down as superstitious when applied to the memorials of our early faith?

History points to her shrines. She will show where Numa concocted the gigantic scheme of paganism; where Hannibal cast his tents in sight of the walls of Rome; where Cicero spoke; where Cæsar fell; the Tarpeian cliff, whence “the traitor’s leap cured ambition.” Will not history of a more noble and sacred kind point out the spots crimsoned with the blood of the martyrs; will not a grateful posterity kneel in reverence at the tombs of their forefathers who died to preserve and defend the sacred deposit of revelation and Christianity?

Still we might linger over the interesting records of the “*Domine, quo vadis?*” but we must move on; the garden of history is in bloom around us; our bouquet is increasing; we must leave room for rare and fragrant stems to be culled in other walks from the Mamertine.



## CHAPTER VII.

### THE LAST HOURS OF THE APOSTLES.

“ Discede adulter Jupiter,  
Stupro sororis ablite,  
Relinque Romam liberam,  
Plebemque jam Christi fuge.

“ Te Paulus hinc exterminat,  
Te sanguis exturbat Petri,  
Tibi id quod ipsi amaveras  
Factum Neronis officit.”

PUDENS.

### I.

**C**E read in Dion Cassius (book lxvi.) that the most terrible day in the annals of the past was that in which Vesuvius suddenly burst forth with desolating fury, destroying several cities, and changing into a desert the garden of Italy. “ There came great droughts and violent earthquakes, so that the whole plain boiled and bubbled, and the hills leaped, and there were noises underground like thunder, and above ground like roaring, and

the sea made a great noise, and the heavens sounded ; and then suddenly a mighty crash was heard as if the mountains were coming together, and first great stones were thrown up to the very summits, then mighty fires and immense smoke, so that the whole air was overshadowed, and the sun entirely hidden as in an eclipse."

Greater and more terrible in its consequences was the day the Apostles Peter and Paul were put to death. The destruction of the volcanic eruption, the mighty cities it buried in its ashes, the devastation and woe it poured out from its blazing crater on the hapless country around, were soon forgotten, and buried in oblivion deeper than the lava that flowed over them. But not so the martyrdom of the apostles of Jesus Christ. Through eighteen centuries has rolled one unbroken sigh of sympathy over the thrilling records of their last moments. Their death was to the infant Church what the darkest eclipse would be to the sun. The bright luminary itself could only be darkened for awhile, and would rise again in greater brilliancy and light; but Christianity, which is the sun of the moral order, was eclipsed on

the day those glorious apostles closed their earthly career.

Returned to the Mamertine after meeting our blessed Lord on the Appian Way, Peter was immediately seized by the soldiers who had heard of his escape. Knowing he was near his death for the faith, he nominated in the same prison his successor in the Holy See, who was Linus, a convert and companion of the Apostle for over twenty years.

According to Cornelius à Lapide,\* Martinielli, and others, St. Peter wrote his Second Epistle from the Mamertine. Most probably St. Paul also dictated in one of the upper chambers of the prison that last and thrilling farewell to Timothy. It would seem those great apostles were carried in spirit through ages yet to come, and permitted by God to see, as they now do from heaven, the subterfuges of heresy in its attacks upon the Church of Christ. St. Peter proclaimed from the Mamertine the great fundamental doctrine of an infallible guiding Church, "like a light that shineth in a dark place until the day dawn." Perhaps, far away on the horizon of time, he saw a lovely island basking in the

\* "In Epist. S. Petri," ii.

sunlight of sanctity, sinking through pride into clouds of error and doubt by the false principle of private interpretation of Sacred Scripture. Can those outside the Catholic Church, who build their hopes for eternity on this ever varying and shifting foundation, read the powerful Epistle (the second) supposed to have been written by St. Peter in the Mamer-tine, without a blush of conscious error? Like the solemn booming of the fog-bell in the dark night, warning the mariners of the vicinity of the rocks and the direction of the port; like the last ringing advice of a dying father to his erring child, through the lapse of eighteen centuries the last words of St. Peter come floating down to us with all their consolation and their terror!

“ Being assured that the laying away of this my tabernacle is at hand, according as our Lord Jesus Christ also hath signified to me. And I will do my endeavor, that after my decease you may also often have whereby you may keep a memory of these things. For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known to you the power and presence of our Lord Jesus Christ: but having been made eye-witness of his majesty.

For he received from God the Father, honor and glory: this voice coming down to him from the excellent glory, ‘This is my beloved Son in whom I have pleased myself, hear ye him.’ And this voice we heard brought from heaven, when we were with him in the holy mount. And we have the more firm prophetical word: whereunto you do well to attend, as a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day-star arise in your hearts. Understanding this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is made by private interpretation. For prophecy came not by the will of man at any time: but the holy men of God spoke, inspired by the Holy Ghost. . . .

“Of this one thing, be not ignorant, my beloved, that one day with the Lord is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord delayeth not his promise, as some imagine, but dealeth patiently for your sake, not willing that any should perish, but that all should return to penance. But the day of the Lord shall come as a thief in which the heavens shall pass away with great violence, and the elements shall be melted with heat, and the

earth and the works which are in it shall be burnt up. Seeing then that all these things are to be dissolved, what manner of people ought you to be in holy conversations and godliness, looking for and hastening unto the coming of the day of the Lord, by which the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with the heat of fire? But we look for new heavens and a new earth according to his promises, in which justice dwelleth. Wherefore, dearly beloved, seeing that you look for these things, be diligent that ye may be found undefiled and unspotted to him in peace: and account the long-suffering of our Lord salvation, as also our most dear brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, hath written to you: \* as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things: in which are certain things hard to be understood, which the unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, to their own destruction. You, therefore, brethren, knowing these things before, take heed, lest being led aside by the error

\* This text might be addressed against Cancellieri, who seems to doubt that St. Paul was in the Mamertine with St. Peter.

of the unwise, you fall from your own steadfastness. But grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and unto the day of eternity.”\*

On the road to St. Paul’s, outside the walls, there is a small chapel, where it is believed the apostles took leave of each other when going to martyrdom. This favor may have been procured by bribes from the Christians, who watched and followed in tears the movements of their beloved apostles; it may have even been granted by the soldiers themselves, some of whom were not only partial, but even suffered martyrdom with St. Paul. Tradition says St. Dionysius, the Areopagite, was present, for in his Epistle to Titus he gives the farewell words of these great servants of God to each other. St. Paul said to St. Peter, “Peace be to you, foundation of the Church, and pastor of the sheep, and entire flock of Christ”; and St. Peter said to St. Paul, “Go in peace, thou preacher of good, mediator of salvation, and leader of the just.” These words, with the reference to St. Dionysius,

\* 2 St. Peter.

are printed in marble in old Italian over the door of the little chapel. At what time a capella was first erected at this spot we cannot find. In the time of Pius IV., there stood a small but decayed chapel commemorating this event, in the centre of the road. The pilgrims of the Most Holy Trinity got possession of it from the Holy Father, and built in its stead the pretty little chapel that now stands on the side of the road. St. Frances of the Torre dei Specchi, had a vineyard immediately opposite this chapel. The saint often placed flowers on the little altar in honor of the apostles.

The last farewell over—a farewell which they knew would in faith be for a few hours only—they separated. St. Paul was brought about two miles further on to a valley entitled *Ad Aquas Salvias*, and St. Peter was led to the Janiculum, then known as a portion of the Vatican, where Jewish malefactors were usually crucified. Still carrying the chains, now preserved in his church on the Esquiline, and giving instructions and advice to the faithful bands of Christians who followed, fearlessly risking their own lives in their affection to their pastor, they crossed the Sublician

bridge, and soon reached the summit of the Janiculum. The proud pagan city lay beneath them; its gilded temples and stately palaces reflected the setting sun in golden splendor—alas! they were the shrines of every species of idolatry that could be suggested by the demons who laughed at the blindness of man. Doubtless St. Peter knew the triumph that would one day dawn over that city, bright indeed with the sunlight of heaven, but in reality sitting in the dark and gloomy shadows of death. Whilst he was pouring forth his last fervent prayer for the conversion of Rome, they arrive at the spot destined for his crucifixion.

During the few moments that passed whilst they were preparing his cross, the Christians who had followed in deep distress gathered around the Apostle to kiss his hand and hear again his last paternal advice and farewell. He told them many things about the Church, the martyrs, and the triumph of Christianity. Suddenly rapt in an ecstasy, he saw the ill-fated city of Jerusalem stretched out before him on the plain towards Ostia, the awful hour and character of its doom written in letters of fire in the clouds above it; in short,

quick, rapid sentences, he told those around him what he saw—the cup of Judaic iniquity full; the times of prophecy come in the third, year of his third successor's reign; the streets flowing with blood from the struggles of civil factions; the Romans intrenched around the city, and battering down the walls; angels pouring over its doomed people their phials of wrath, of famine, pestilence, and woe; the temple in flames and crumbling to the ground in a terrific crash; over a million of his countrymen slain, and one hundred thousand prisoners, and the people that called the curse of the Messiah's blood upon them, scattered to the four winds of heaven. “O Jerusalem!” cried out the Apostle, whose eyes were bedewed with tears, “Jerusalem who hast killed the prophets and the King of prophets, if thou didst but know the things that are for thy peace!” Whilst yet speaking, one of the executioners rudely pushed him by the shoulder towards the cross which they had now prepared for its victim. He requested to be crucified with his head downwards, as more ignominious than the death of our Blessed Lord. He was nailed to the cross. He preached to the people around

whilst able. Two angels appeared one on each side of his cross, and chanted one of the inspired psalms alternately between them, and after two hours' agony the great Apostle passed from his earthly toil to his divine Master to whom alone he would go for eternal life.\*

When the subsiding tumult had evinced that the city had retired to rest, there ventured forth under the azure gloom of night a little band of disciples, who often paused to listen or drew aside in trepidation under the deep shade of an arch or portico, until at last they found themselves beyond the Tiber on the highest point of the Janiculum. There

\* There is a tradition that the wife and daughter of St. Peter suffered martyrdom, and that he was present at the death of the former. 'Tis but a stray rivulet of tradition that gives us this fact; it has not yet entered the majestic stream of history. However, in a letter of Clement of Alexandria, quoted by Orsi, vol. iv., we find her name was Hacca. On her way to execution, St. Peter met her, and, encouraging her to be firm, said: "Hacca, memento Domine!" One would fancy the Apostle had but time to say a couple of words, and thus skilfully threw into a brief sentence the thrilling reminiscences of the past. The passion, the resurrection, and the consoling doctrines of eternal life are so wrapt up with the name of Jesus as to be inseparable from it. Where or how the good Hacca received her crown, we will leave the reader to enquire from herself when he meets her at the gate-house of the celestial kingdom, where surely she takes care of the keys with her Claviger Peter.

the lifeless body of St. Peter still hung upon the cross to which the persecutors had nailed his venerable hands and feet. It was a piteous sight! The beard and gray hairs of the venerable man were clotted with the gore trickling down from the wounds by which he hung, and bedewing his limbs, emaciated with age and apostolic labors. That frame, whose shadows used to raise the paralytic and plague-stricken from their litters, had now "no soundness in it"; dimmed, drowned with gore was that eye which had grown familiar with the incarnate Word; the feet that Jesus washed, that had carried the tidings of salvation around provinces and kingdoms, were torn with ghastly wounds; transfixed was that hand that raised the paralytic in the portico of the temple, and that lifted Tabitha from the bier, and touched the son of Pudens and made him rise; silent that tongue that upbraided "the whole house of Israel" with deicide, and preached with the fire of the Paraclete in the midst of Jerusalem with such potency as to lay prostrate in adoration of Jesus crowds who had shouted, "Not him, but Barabbas!"

Amongst the crowd of pious Christians

who came to take away the body of Peter there were Timotheus (the son of Pudens restored to life) and his venerable father. They were heart-broken with grief; the very stars of heaven look down as if they were afflicted, so pensive was the light they shed upon the martyred body and the group that gazed upon it with streaming eyes, their hands clasped or lifted in the excess of their tribulation. But no loud cry or wailing escaped even from the virgin tenderness of Petronilla, or of Prudentiana or Praxedes, who helped Claudia and Basilissa and other Christian matrons to collect every drop of blood in sponges, and to deposit in caskets the sand saturated with his blood. No sound broke the dead stillness of the night but stifled sobs and the most mute murmuring, like the gentle echo of distant psalmody, as they drew out the nails, depositing them with care into napkins, and then receiving into their arms with reverence the corpse now loosened from the cross; wrapping it in the shroud, with trembling haste they bore it through by-paths and thickets until they came to a lonely region among the sand-pits of the Vatican. Having traversed by the light of flambeaus a

succession of long, narrow corridors—a labyrinth of darkness—they came to where they were anxiously expected by some of the clergy and laity of Rome assembled in the heart of those catacombs.

From the night after the crucifixion of St. Peter the crypt close to the Circus of Nero, where his dead body had reposed, became a hallowed spot and a place of prayer and pilgrimage for the Christians. It was the greatest privilege of his successors to be laid in death near the great chief and first viceroy of Christ's kingdom. A small oratory or tomb was erected there as early as the year 106 by one of his own faithful priests, who afterwards succeeded him in the Pontificate. It shared the fate of all the places consecrated to Christian worship. It was a heap of ruins when the triumph of the Labarum gave peace to the Christian world. Amongst the places dear to the Christians in the hallowed memories of the past the first was the shrine of the great Apostle. Constantine, who had entered into every Christian feeling, and who, it seems, had a special devotion to St. Peter, ordered the Senate, the legions, and the Roman people to meet on an appointed day

at the Circus of Nero, where the first fathers in the faith were so unmercifully butchered ; there he dismounted from his chariot, and, laying aside his golden diadem, he prostrated himself before the confession of the Apostle, and poured out floods of tears so that they streamed down over the ornaments of his imperial robes. Then, taking a spade, he dug with his own hands the first traces of the foundation ; he carried on his shoulders twelve basketfuls of earth, and thus commenced the mighty basilica which is now one of the wonders of the world—“the grandest temple the hands or even the imagination of man ever raised to the worship of God.”

## II.

BARONIUS gives the following account of the martyrdom of St. Paul :

“ It is related, whilst he was proceeding to the place of execution, accompanied by an immense crowd of people, and arriving at the gate of the city, they met a most illustrious matron named Plautilla (called differently by some), whom we believe to be the mother of Flavia Domitilla, as mentioned in the

Roman Martyrology (20th May), and in the Acts of SS. Nereus and Achilleus, baptized by St. Peter, and who died the same year as the apostles. Seeing her weeping, the Apostle asked her for her veil, by which he could bind his eyes, according to the custom of the Jews, before being struck with the sword, promising to return it to her. She willingly consented, and gave it to him. The place where this happened is said to be near the Ostian Gate, consecrated with a small chapel in memory of this event.

Whilst they were thus leading him to execution, he converted three of the soldiers who accompanied him, who, persevering in constancy of faith, were executed three days afterwards by the emperor. These martyrs, whose names were Longinus, Acestus, and Megistus, are commemorated by the Church with great solemnity on the 2d of July. When, therefore, they arrived at the place destined for his martyrdom, having poured forth some fervent prayers, he cheerfully presented his neck to the executioner. The place is called *Ad Aquas Salvias*, at the third milestone from the city, where afterwards

many Christians were slaughtered; for here also, all ancient monuments attest, were executed Zeno and ten thousand soldiers. Here, then, with one stroke of the executioner, the head of Paul was cut off, and, strange to relate, milk rather than blood flowed from the veins of his neck. This fact, so remarkable, is not only given in the above-mentioned Acts (those attributed to Pope Linus, who was, perhaps, eye-witness), but is confirmed by many other testimonies. St. Ambrose, speaking of this circumstance as if certain and undoubted, uses these expressions: "It is said, when the neck of Paul was struck by the sword of the persecutor, a wonderful stream of milk rather than blood flowed, so that the mysterious grace of Baptism, his martyrdom, was splendid rather than bloody. Which, indeed, in Paul was not marvellous. What wonder that he abounded in milk who was the nourisher (nutritor) of the Church, as he himself said to the Corinthians: 'I have given you milk to drink, not food' (1 Cor. 3). This is clearly that land of promise which God promised to our fathers, saying, 'I

will give you a land flowing with milk and honey.' He did not mean the land of the earth, which, mixing with water, becomes dirt and mud, but that of Paul and such as Paul, which is ever pure and sweet. What honey sweeter than the Epistles of Paul? what milk whiter? For they are like the breasts of the churches they nourished to salvation. From the neck, therefore, of the Apostle there flowed milk instead of blood." Thus far Ambrose. Also, St. John Chrysostom, a most mighty authority, speaks thus: "But the praises of Paul, who was decapitated, we cannot in words declare. Shall not the sword that cut that throat be taken to heaven as a divine instrument for the terror of the earth? How holy the place that received thy blood, which appeared as milk on the garments of him who struck thee, touching his barbarous soul, rendering it sweeter than honey, so that, with his companions, he was led to the faith!" etc.

We must not pass over another fact, memorable in connection with his martyrdom, not mentioned in many writings, yet sustained by a most faithful tradition from our ancestors. When the head of Paul was

separated from his body, animated by a divine power ("vi quadam spiritus divinitus agitavit"), it gave three leaps, where three fountains immediately sprang up from the earth. The waters have a milky taste in the first fountain, not so much in the others; which is explained by the circumstance that milk first came out of his veins, and then blood. This place, called "The Three Fountains," is undoubtedly celebrated throughout all Christianity, and has ever been the object of devotion to an immense concourse of people.

The handkerchief of Plautilla, having served its object, was returned to her by the saint in a vision. It is of the same we find mention in the letters of Gregory, who was asked for this relic by Constantina Augusta; but, as it was enclosed in the case with the relics of the Apostle, the holy Pontiff would not open the case for the purpose.\*

The body of St. Paul was taken by Lucina, a matron of senatorial rank, and interred in her own garden on the Ostian Way. †

\* Epis. Reg., lib. 3, epis. 3.

† Baronius, "Annales," anno 69, No. 10, and following.

## PART SECOND.





## CHAPTER VIII.

### I.

ALEXANDER, POPE AND MARTYR.

**O**UR subject now leads us into the marvellous. In the landscape before us there are fairy scenes. Were we not convinced that they come from the pencil of history, we would hand them over to the lovers of verse and legend. Tinged, embellished, it may be, by the crayons of fancy, we believe the extraordinary records before us are substantially true. We will defend our credulity in anticipating and answering a question that may naturally be asked — Do you, then, believe all the legends mentioned in the lives of the saints?

To the relief of many outside the pale of the Church, and the consolation of timid

souls within, we frankly reply, By no means.

There are, we confess, a vast number of legends which may be ranked amongst fairy-tales. Pious tradition is a benevolent goddess, that has gathered under her wings a vast amount of marvellous but instructive legends that amuse the uneducated mind. These legends blend with, and at times corrupt like muddy waters, the clear stream of truth. There are pious histories, around the Lipsanothecas of the great Catholic countries, that would while away many a pleasant hour at the winter fire; yet the boundary line of truth and fable is easily discerned. They blend before the ignorant and incredulous like the perspective of a landscape, where the trees seem to touch the stars and the moon issues from the depths of the forest. When the ocean is glistening under the parting rays of the setting sun, it would appear as if a sea-bird could touch with the extremities of his wings the bluish boundary line of the wave and the red disc of the orb of day, yet how many millions of miles separate them!

If some legendary writer, through credulity or ignorance, has thrown around his favorite saint the romance of popular and exaggerated devotion, or adopted too easily the sensational tales of pilgrims returning from distant lands, does it follow that all histories have been so written? Is there not some difference between the pious dreams of credulous old age related around the domestic hearth and the documents before the student in the study of his library? Are there not some pages in history perfectly authentic? Read the following statements concerning the Acts of the martyrs, and then say if they are legends.

Pope Clement instituted seven notaries to make a collection of the principal facts and compose the Acts of the first martyrs. St. Fabian, Pope and martyr, finding this number insufficient, associated with them seven deacons and the same number of subdeacons. Their writings were submitted to the personal examination of the Pontiff and then deposited in the archives of Rome. The scenes in court, the interviews between the Christian martyrs and the tyrant judges, were written by the pagans themselves, and pre-

served as the records of the judicial proceedings. And these Acts, thus compiled from pagan sources, where there was no likelihood of pious exaggeration, were read in certain churches on the anniversary of their death, as Cardinal Baronius has remarked, and as proved by the thirteenth chapter of the Council of Carthage, by the history of Gregory of Tours, and by an epistle of Pope Adrian to the Emperor Charlemagne. All the lives of the saints were not then abandoned to the pens of credulous and legendary writers more remarkable for piety and zeal than literary acumen.

But independently of those ecclesiastical historians who wrote, as it were, under the very eyes of the Roman pontiffs, the greatest doctors, the finest geniuses, of Catholicism did not disdain this labor. St. Athanasius, St. Basil, St. Gregory of Nazianzen St. John Chrysostom, Theodore, amongst the Greeks, and amongst the Latins Ambrose, Augustine, Gregory the Great, Paulinus, Bernard, and Bonaventure, have written lives of saints and have related miracles of which they declare themselves to have been eye-witnesses. "To condemn at one sweep all such his-

tories," says an eloquent French writer, "appears to me singularly presumptuous. When St. Augustine testifies he saw a blind child recover his sight by the tomb of SS. Gervase and Protase at Milan, are we to accuse him and two other bishops to whom he appeals as witnesses of simplicity, credulity, and imposture? Is there any one in our days so presumptuous as to think he is to be compared with them, either in piety, or learning, or judgment?" \*

Yet in the Acts of the Martyrs and in the lives of the saints, given us by the great doctors of the Church, there are facts more marvellous than any of the legends gathered under the wings of pious tradition; they prove the proverb, "Truth is stranger than fiction." No mind could, even in the loftiest flights of fancy, build the fabric of history more fabulous than we find it. In the mysterious manifestations of Divine Providence over man, in every page of the history of the past, we find records of miracles and marvels of mercy and goodness which would seem like the ravings of an enthusiast, were they not proved by the divine authority.

\* Montaigne.

There is a courage in divine faith that finds little difficulty in accepting the things that are of God. They are wonderful because they form part of the stupendous mystery of Christianity. Those who reject everything that is strange are the hapless victims of a proud, foolish private judgment; they are those who make faith a system of thought that flits through theories like birds through trees when the wind is strong; finding one branch too unsteady, they try another. They call faith the privilege of professing one doctrine in the morning and its contradiction at sunset. Doubtless with secret approbation they view at a distance the happy confidence of the Catholic's unchanging faith. He who gazes on the sun is dazzled and loses the power of fixing anything definitely; thus the victim of disbelief, bewildered in uncertainty, turns from the contemplation of Catholic truth to seek comfort in the liberty of free judgment, but finds himself drifting away into error like the guideless bark on the ocean's immensity.

A wholesale rejection of the mementos and relics preserved in the hallowed memories of Christianity involves an inconsistency

which should cause a blush on the brow of an educated man. Is there a nation, is there a family, is there an individual that does not show some reverence for the things of the past? The sacred fig-tree under which it was supposed that Romulus was suckled by the wolf was preserved for centuries in the Roman Forum.

The first bridge that was cast across the Tiber, and memorable for the heroism of a Scævola, was so dear to the old Romans it was still preserved in wood when majestic stone arches spanned the torrent. It was committed to the care of the priests, and hence most probably arose the title of *pontiffs*.\*

What was dearer to the ancients than their Penates, loved not so much from a blind, idolatrous superstition as from family traditions represented in those household deities?

This love for the past is not alone a pagan virtue. The lock of hair, the photograph of some dear one passed away, the last memento of severed love, is kissed and pressed to the

\* Pontifex in Latin from *pons*, a bridge, and *facere*, to make. Baronius and Martinelli will have the derivation from words signifying conferring power.

bosom; no gold would purchase the faded pictures that hang in the ancestral halls of our mediæval castles; far away in our anti-podes some poor Irish exile will reverently close in his prayer-book a blossom from the hawthorn tree that grew near his cabin-door. Is this universal and irresistible respect which all classes of society show to the mementos of the past to be cried down as superstitious and sinful when applied to the relics of the saints? There are men who laugh with ridicule at the liquid blood of a martyr extracted from a recess in the Catacombs, and will pay large sums for a broken faun or a coin covered with verdigris. See how the world points with reverence to her historical shrines. She will show the spot where Numa planned the gigantic scheme of paganism, where Hannibal encamped in sight of the walls of Rome, where Cicero spoke in the Forum, where Cæsar fell, where the Tarpeian cliff frowns on the Capitol heights, where

“The traitor’s leap cured ambition.”

Why could not tradition of a more holy and sacred character show the spots crimsoned with the blood of the martyrs, sanctified by

their miracles, or honored with their remains ? The impious and incredulous, who are crushed in their errors by the overwhelming weight of tradition, would be glad to have us believe that the sacred memorials of the past, the Acts of the martyrs, and miracles wrought at their tombs, are but the dreams of enthusiastic pilgrims and huge fabrications invented for a pious deception. In the gilded fabrications of modern worship there is no past. They have no Catacombs, with their thrilling lessons, that prove the unbroken chain with the disciples of the apostles ; they have no honored histories or relics of martyrs ; they have no sanctuaries holy in the hallowed reminiscences of centuries ; hence they endeavor to sweep away everything that would remind of the mushroom growth of the heresies they call truth. If these heresies be true, then the tale told by the Roman Catacombs, with their millions of martyrs, becomes more terrible and thrilling ; the sleeping dead, whose crimson tombs tell of awful suffering, were but the victims of a gigantic imposition, and that sanctioned by the miracles of the Most High.

## II.

THE "Acts of Alexander" open with an event that startled the whole city of Rome. The prefect of the city became a Christian, and in thanksgiving liberated one thousand two hundred and fifty slaves.

The tyranny of man to his fellow-man causes the blush to mantle on the Christian brow. It is the problem of our existence. That man should become the property of another, lose all moral rights, and sink to treatment not given to irrational brutes, constitutes one of the most terrible forms of human suffering. In old times he was richest and greatest who could cause most misery to his fellow-creatures. The rich men of Rome counted their slaves by thousands, and the law allowed them traffic in human beings as we do in cattle. They were worked under

the lash in vineyards, sandpits, and buildings; often in fetters and in starvation; the most delicate forms were exposed without raiment to the cold blast of winter. Pass at night-time the gorgeous palace of some wealthy senator: there are slaves chained to the portals like dogs to scare the thief or intruder. Look into the Ergastula, the sleeping-cellars of the slaves: some hundreds of those hapless wretches huddled together in fearful violation of the dictates of morality, in hunger and cold, less comfortable than the stables of our horses! See those wretches sitting on the muddy banks of the island in the Tiber, naked, their hands tied, and weeping in all the agony of pitiless despair: they are condemned slaves awaiting the arrival of some tyrant owner, who will give the order to end their miseries beneath the yellow wave of the river. That master comes to enjoy the sight of their dying struggles, to hear the music of the last shrill, drowning cry of his perishing victims! When we float in thought over those horrible developments of the slave system, those scenes of history where the wretched were victims of such incredible

barbary, we feel we could thank the Almighty, in the name of the human race, for the regeneration by Christianity.

Not the individual only, not an exceptional domestic tyrant, bore the brand of inhumanity towards the slaves, but the law, the whole national feeling, assigned them a moral degradation beyond excuse or palliation. It was once decreed by the Senate that four hundred slaves should be put to death because one of their number had murdered his master. And this poor wretch had purchased his freedom in hard cash; not only was liberty refused him, but his betrothed bride was violated. In a fit of rage he plunged his dagger into the heart of the villain; yet there was no justice for the slave.\*

Cicero writes: "If the immortal gods were visibly to descend amongst us to designate and set a mark upon that profanation by which their ire has been enkindled, what could they light on more foul and abominable than that the amphitheatre and circus where the Roman people worship them should

\* Tacitus, book iv., nos. 42, 43.

be polluted by the presence of your slaves."\*

To know the horrors of the slavery of the early ages we have only to look on it in its modern form, for, alas ! the slave-dhow still haunts the Southern seas. Their holds are filled with hapless wretches torn by brutal force from the little huts on their native hills and hunting-grounds, where peace and plenty once smiled, and where they enjoyed in liberty the ennobling feelings of domestic union and love of country. The slave-markets still dishonor the fair lands of the West. The aged father, broken-down with toil, torn from his spouse and children, is obliged to work under the lash; the tender mother is separated from her offspring, who cling to her neck with the heartrending agony of blasted affection ; every tie of human decency or human right cast to the wind; trampled or sold for a paltry coin. The sigh of suffering humanity is poured forth from the golden plantations of the South, where those hapless children of toil are starving amidst wealth

\* "Quid magis deformatum, inquinatum, perversum, conturbatum dici potest."—*Cicero in Orat. de Harusp., resp. xii.*

and plenty they have earned with the sweat  
of their brow.

" And each endures while yet he draws his breath  
A stroke as galling as the scythe of Death.  
The sable warrior, frantic with regret  
Of her he loves and never can forget,  
Loses in tears the far-receding shore,  
But not the thought that they must meet no more.  
Deprived of her and freedom at a blow,  
What has he left that he can yet forego?  
Yes, to deep sadness sullenly resigned,  
He feels his body's bondage in his mind,  
Puts off his gen'rous nature, and to suit  
His manners with his fate, puts on the brute.  
Oh ! most degrading of all the ills that wait  
On man, a mourner in his best estate,  
All other sorrows virtue may endure,  
And find submission more than half a cure.  
Grief is itself a medicine, and bestowed  
To improve the fortitude that bears a load,  
To teach the wand'rer, as his woes increase,  
The path of wisdom, all whose paths are peace.  
But Slavery ! virtue dreads it as her grave ;  
Patience itself is meanness in a slave ;  
Nature imprints on whate'er we see  
That has a heart and life in it—Be free !  
The beasts are chartered ; neither age nor force  
Can quell the love of freedom in a horse ;  
He breaks the cord that held him at the rack,  
And, conscious of an unencumbered back,  
Snuffs up the morning air, forgets the rein,  
Loose fly his forelock and his ample mane ;  
Responsive to the distant neigh, he neighs,

Nor stops, till overleaping all delays,  
He finds the pasture where his fellows graze."

COWPER.

But modern slavery in its mitigated form is but the echo of its past terrors. Thus we do not wonder at the desperate resistance made to the Roman arms by barbarian nations; they knew the lot awaited them as the slaves of the conquerors; nor do we wonder at the Christians, according to the expression of the fathers, to be treated as if they were no longer human beings, because they were treated as slaves; and thus, too, we understand the commotion in the city of Rome in the second century of our era, when one thousand two hundred and fifty Christian slaves were set free by the prefect Hermes.

The cause of this strange event is interesting. Death had cast his gloomy shadow on the palace of Hermes. What wealth, what power will bid this scoffer of human greatness stay at the portals of our homes and defy him to enter! The only son of the prefect, a blooming boy in the morning of his days, was cut down by the slow but fatal ravages of consumption. Whilst the child

was yet struggling with his malady, and hourly expecting the fatal moment of dissolution, the distracted father, clinging to a hope, made the altars of the Capitol blaze with daily sacrifices to its marble gods; but in vain. Neither rewards to the priests and physicians nor vows of more blood availed: the child died.

In the midst of the funeral pomp, and the tears of the afflicted parents and relatives, a poor blind nurse, who loved the child dearly, had heard of the powerful God of the Christians, whose votaries never prayed in vain. In the liberty and familiarity their common affliction permitted, she chided the father for not bringing the child to the chief of the Christian religion. Hermes taunted her with her blindness, and asked why she herself was not cured by the Christian bishop. Under the impulse of a divine grace she hurried to the Pope Alexander, received her sight, hastened back to the palace of Hermes, took the dead child in her arms, and, hurrying through the streets, laid him at the feet of Alexander. The absent spirit was called back to the lifeless body, and the boy hastened home to remove with his own hand the

emblems of death that hung around his afflicted home. His father and mother became Christians. The slaves, too, subservient to the beck of their master, and enlightened by the same sunbeam of divine faith, joined in the loud hymn of praise to the only powerful God—the God of the Christians.

Their freedom followed their baptism. They were scattered through the city to declare the praises of God and their good master, and the miracle that made them free. The baths, the Forum, and the Circus rang with the startling news; small crowds gathered together to discuss the strange event, or listen to some bombastic declaimer lamenting the disgrace that had fallen on the city. Their prefect a Christian and liberty given to twelve hundred slaves was an event more remarkable than the defeat of the Parthians or the death of Trajan, that happened at the same time. Bands of enthusiastic zealots roamed through the streets shouting, “Let Hermes be burnt alive!” whilst others, who knew Alexander, the head of the Christians, was the cause of the supposed disaster, called for his immediate execution;

loud and shrill was the shout that echoed through the Forum, “Christiani ad leones!”

Shortly before his death Trajan, who was in the East, heard of the wide spread of Christianity, and sent a deputy named Aurelian to exterminate it in the city of Rome. Being the representative of the emperor himself, he had a higher power than Hermes; consequently he had the prefect seized and placed him in *privata custodia*, under the care of Quirinus, a tribune of the prætorian camp in charge of the Mamertine. The holy Pontiff Alexander was also seized, but for him there was neither mercy nor respect, and he was cast into the lower dungeon of the Mamertine. Hermes, on account of his former dignity, was confined in a room in the tribune's own house, and directions were given to the tribune to use his influence to bring back their cherished prefect to the worship of idols. Thus the “Acts” open with these two great champions in prison, then lead us to a series of events that constitute one of the most thrilling tragedies of the early Church.

## III.

TOWARDS sunset on the 1st of May, in the year of our Lord 132, the military tribune who had charge of the Mamertine crossed the Roman Forum; rapt in deep thought, and heedless of the ever-changing crowd, he made his way towards his palatial residence on the Aventine. News had reached the city Trajan had “passed to the gods” when he had conquered the Parthians, and Adrian was declared Cæsar by the army. The people were gathered in small crowds discussing all the possible contingencies of the strange news, and the hum of many voices rose and fell in the arched Forum like billows on the sea-shore. It was not the political changes debated by the crowd that rapt Quirinus in silent thought and made him move with rapid step and downcast eyes. A strange feeling of awe had crept over his noble soul. He had just come from the Tullian keep, where he had locked heavy chains to the hands and feet and neck of the chief of the Christian sect, and he was proceeding to his own home, where he had

also bound in chains, for the same cause, the late prefect of the city.

The halo of sanctity that beamed from the eyes of the holy Pontiff, the victim of his dungeon, haunted his thoughts, and the brave conduct of Hermes, giving up wealth, power, and probably life, for the Christian sect, puzzled his clouded understanding. "There must be some divine, magical power to charm to fatal fascination in those Christians, or else their God is alone great and true." Thus thought Quirinus. Amidst a struggle with the first glimmerings of enlightened thought flashing through his soul, and the blind prejudice of his old pagan spirit, he reached his home on the Aventine.

According to the custom of the *Custodia privata*, Hermes was locked in a room of the house of Quirinus. Although surrounded by magnificence, still he was in chains; a prisoner, but treated with that respect which his position and old friendship with the tribune demanded. He was on his knees in communion with God, and praying for the conversion of the tribune's family, when the heavy key grated in the iron lock, and

Quirinus entered, commencing immediately a conversation of deep and thrilling interest, which we will quote almost literally from the "Acts":

"How comes it, Hermes," said Quirinus, "that an illustrious man like you is reduced to this infamy? You not only abandon the prefectship, but cheerfully accept these chains."

"I don't lose the prefectship," replied Hermes; "but I have changed it for another. All earthly dignities, Quirinus, are easily blasted, but a celestial honor remains in eternal sublimity."

"Now, I wonder at such a prudent man," retorted Quirinus, with an air of sarcastic sympathy, "carried away with the ridiculous fancy that you will exist after death. Do you not know the human body so decays in the lapse of time that not even the dust of your bones will be found?"

"Ah! Quirinus, I once thought so too; but by the light that has been given me, I know life to be a fleeting shadow, and what is noblest in man is immortal!"

"Could you prove what you say, Hermes, and perhaps I, too, might believe."

"Alexander, the holy bishop you have in chains, taught me this consoling doctrine—"

"Thunders of Jupiter fall on you and him," said Quirinus, interrupting him. "See, Hermes, go back to your position as prefect, recall your senses which you seem to have lost, enjoy your wealth and beautiful family and splendid palace. Don't let your enemies scoff at your downfall and the sad condition you are now in."

"But, Quirinus, you would not let me answer your question," retorted Hermes mildly.

"I asked you," said Quirinus, "to prove for me what you said, and you commenced to speak of a vile magician that I have in chains and cast into the lower dungeon of our prison. Do you think I am so foolish as to mind what you say about a wretch who has deceived you, now paying the penalty of his crimes in bonds and horrible darkness, to be burnt, perhaps, to-morrow or the next day? If he be any good, let him free himself and you."

"Quirinus, when the Jews put our Lord Jesus Christ on the cross, they said the same thing: 'Let him come down now from the

cross, if he is able, and we will believe in him.' Had he not seen their hearts were hardened and filled with perfidy, he would have done it."

"Well, I will tell you what I will do," said Quirinus, confident of having struck on a good thought: "I will go to him and say, If you wish me to believe that you are a minister and worship the only true God, either you come to Hermes or let Hermes come to you, then I will believe all you say."\*

Hermes, filled with holy confidence in God, and ardently desiring the conversion of Quirinus, said, "Well, let it be so," accepting the challenge to perform an extraordinary miracle.

Quirinus, smiling, said: "I will go now, and I will triple his chains and guards, and will tell him he must come to you at supper-time; and, if he can stay with you the whole night, I will believe that he is able to instruct me."†

\* "Ego vado ad eum et dico illi, Si vis ut credam te verum Dei preconem et verum Deum esse quem colis, aut te apud Hermen inyeniam aut Hermen apud te, et omnia quæ mihi dixeris credam."—*Acts Bollandists, May 3.*

† "Vadam ergo modo et super eum vincula triplicabo et

Alexander was rapt in prayer in his gloomy prison of the Mamertine, when he heard the iron grating that closed the opening overhead move, the conversation of men, and the clanking of heavy chains. Doubtless, he thought the hour of his passion had come, and, with a fervent aspiration for strength, he prepared himself for the worst. Another moment Quirinus descended into the dungeon, and applied three additional chains to the holy Pontiff. Alexander, who allowed himself be bound as they wished, wondered at the necessity of tripling his chains in that awful cell, whence escape was impossible. At length Quirinus told him of the extraordinary challenge accepted by his friend Hermes, and telling him good-humoredly he would also put three additional guards at the entrance, and then bade Alexander get out if he could.

Left once more alone in the prison, the holy man began to think over what had passed. How strange Hermes should make that appointment! But he who wishes the

**custodes dicamque illi ut eum apud te inveniam cœnandi hora, et si hoc potuerit facere per totam noctem, credam quod et me poterit edocere." —*Acts Bollandists, May 3.***

salvation of man will also give power to perform the miracle to save a soul. Alexander remembered that the prayer of Josue made the sun stand still, that the prayer of Moses gained victory for the Israelites, and that the angel delivered Peter from prison. As all things are possible to faith, according to the word of Christ, full of confidence in God, he prayed thus: "O Lord Jesus Christ! who has placed me on the chair of thy apostle Peter, send me an angel who will bring me hence at evening time to the house of Hermes, and back in the morning, no one being aware of my absence until I return."

He continued in prayer. When darkness had fallen on the city (*primo nocturno silentio*), behold, his prison is suddenly filled with a beautiful light, and a lovely child stood beside Alexander, holding in its hand a lighted torch; turning towards the holy Pontiff, the child said, "Follow me!"

Alexander was afraid that perhaps there might be some delusion of the devil in what he saw, and said to the child, "As our Lord Jesus Christ lives, I will not stir out of this until you kneel down and pray with me." The child, who seemed not to be older than

five years,\* knelt with him, and they prayed for half an hour, terminating their meditations by reciting together the Pater Noster.

Then the child took Alexander by the hand and led him through the opening, and conducted him to the house of Hermes.†

At the appointed time Quirinus went to the room where he had confined and bound in chains the prefect Hermes. Not dreaming that an extraordinary union between these two holy souls could be effected, he determined to try his eloquence once more on Hermes to induce him to abandon the Christian faith. He unlocked the door, when, lo! there was Alexander kneeling beside Hermes, his arms stretched out in prayer. Quirinus was frightened. He fan-

\* "Qui videbatur non amplius erat quam quinque annorum."

† "Et apprehendens manum ejus puer duxit eum, ad fenestram quæ erat clausa et quasi ostium aperuit eum et perduxit eum ad Hermen."—*Acts, etc.* Some have believed from the expression here in the "Acts" that, the word *fenestram* being used, Alexander was not confined in the Mamertine; however, a close study will show that he was really confined in this prison. The *fenestra* which *quasi ostium* the angel opened was the only ingress for light, food, or persons into the prison. Baronius, Piazza, and Martinelli have interpreted the "Acts" to mean the Mamertine.

cied a magical delusion passed before him.\* Seeing his excitement, Hermes at length broke silence, and said: "Quirinus, you professed to me that, if you saw us who were separated in body but united in spirit come together bodily, you would believe; now you see the fact; nor fancy it is for our gratification you see us, who to-morrow will be bound again in your chains, thus freed, but that thy soul may be liberated from the bonds of superstition and error, that you may believe in our Lord Jesus Christ, who hears those believing in him, and grants what they ask in faith, and nothing hesitating."

Quirinus, at whose heart grace was rapping for admission, said to Hermes, in a tone that betrayed his confusion: "Our magicians could do all this!"

"Could magicians break through prisons, and loosen the threefold chain, and break through the trebled guard?" asked Hermes indignantly. "No, Quirinus, only He, our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave sight to the blind, cured lepers and paralytics, cast out

\* "Aperuit ostium et inveniens eos simul extensis manibus orantes et faculam ardentem videns, exterritus est."—*Acts.*

devils, and called the dead from their tombs, could perform such wonders. But hear me for a moment, Quirinus, and I will tell you how I became a Christian, and gained such unlimited faith in this holy man (pointing to Alexander), whom you do not yet know.

"I had an only son, as charming a boy as ever laughed back to a mother's joy. As he grew in years he became passionately fond of study; too much application told on his delicate frame, and a slow malady seized his frame.\* We brought him to the Capitol, and, with large offerings, we made the altars of the gods flow with the blood of innumerable victims, but in vain: the boy died. Whilst I and his broken-hearted mother were weeping over his lifeless form our old blind nurse stood by, and in tears reproved me thus: 'Master, had you taken the child to the seat of Peter (*ad limina Petri*) and believed in Christ, your boy would live now.'

"Looking on the affectionate nurse with sympathy, I said: 'And you, Miria, you are blind, and why are you not cured?'

\* "Qui adhuc ad litterarum studia ambulabat in nimio languore positus," etc.

"Indeed, 'tis true,' she replied. 'I am blind now five years, but if I believed in Jesus Christ I, too, would have had my sight.'

"In my grief I could but smile, and in the mockery of unbelief I said to her: 'Go then, and believe, and, if the Christian bishop give you your sight, I will perhaps believe he could raise up my son.'

"She hurried away before I had finished speaking, and fled whither I know not. It was the third hour, and at the sixth she returned perfectly cured.\*

"We were all gathered around the corpse of my lovely boy; she rushed through us, and, without saying a word, took the lad in her arms, and fled out of the house so fast that our youths could not follow her. I learned afterwards she had taken him to Alexander (pointing to the holy bishop, who was praying in his heart for the conversion of Quirinus). Casting the dead body at his feet, she cried out, 'Let me be blind again, but give life to this child.' The holy bishop replied to her: 'What

\* "Tunc abiit ad ipsum cœca circa horam tertiam et ecce hora diei sexta reversa est ad me sana," etc.—*Acts.*

Christ has given you He will not take from you, but will also give you the life of this child.' He prayed. Another moment and the boy bounded to his feet, and ran to our embrace alive and sound.\*

"Immediately that I saw these wonders I made the nurse bring me to the holy bishop, and, casting myself at his feet, I prayed he would let me also be a Christian, which I am, thanks be to God, from that day. I appointed the bishop to be the tutor of my son, and the property that had come to me by the child's deceased mother I gave, with a great deal more from my own resources, to Alexander, for the use of the Christian Church; my slaves I set free, and the remnant of my property I gave to the poor; and now, in bonds, and perhaps even under the very shadow of death, I fear not the threat of confiscation; I defy the impotent rage of the emperor, and in confidence in Jesus I will run to grasp the crown He has promised to His martyrs."

Whilst the ex-prefect concluded the interesting account of his conversion, his coun-

\* "Et ipse per se veniens ad me, redidisset filium meum viventem et sanum."—*Acts.*

tenance glowed with zeal, and he spoke with the eloquence and fire that burned in his generous heart. In his contempt of earthly goods, in his fearless defiance of torment and death, he was the stamp of the true Christian. His words fell with celestial power on Quirinus, who had already made up his mind how to act; yet amid the contending passions of his soul one seemed to claim particular attention at that moment. Hearing the wonderful cures performed by Alexander, he naturally thought of his poor, afflicted daughter Balbina, who, grown to girlhood, was beautiful, accomplished, and amiable, but, unfortunately, was very much disfigured in the neck by a scrofula contracted in her infancy. Her father loved her beyond measure, but was sorely afflicted because this deformity precluded the hope of honorable espousals which he had intended for her according to her noble position. Casting himself at their feet, he cried out: "Grant me a favor, and gain my soul also to Christ. I have a daughter whom every beauty adorns, but she is afflicted with a scrofula on the neck.\* Cure her, and I will

\* "Sed collum ejus struma circumdat."—*Acts.*

leave her all I have, and will follow you to Christ."

Alexander, in sympathy for the father in his affliction, and knowing he would gain both to salvation, replied, "Go and bring her to the prison to me quickly, take the iron collar you put around my neck, and let her wear it for some time; in the morning you will find her cured."\*

"But how?" replied Quirinus. "You are here in my house now: how will I find you in the prison?"

"Never mind, but go quickly and do what I asked you. He who brought me hither will bring me back before you can get there."

When going out, Quirinus wished to leave open the door which he had previously locked and bolted on Hermes, but they prevailed on him to shut it as it was before.† Whilst Alexander and Hermes were taking leave of each other in prayer, the little boy with his burning torch opened the window, beckoned Alexander to follow him, and, being absent one hour, brought him back to

\* "Et tolle bojam de collo meo et impone ei et fac simul illam manere cum boja et mane invenies illam salvam."—*Acts*

\* "Et cum nollet, coegerunt et clausit."—*Ib.*

the Mamertine, and, putting his chains on him again, disappeared.\*

Quirinus returned to his own quarters. Astonished and perplexed, he thought he was in a dream. The miracles performed by his Christian prisoners were overwhelming. The conversion of Hermes, the promise to cure his daughter, and the feeling of gratitude, mingled with the sanctity of his promise, swept away from his heart the lingering attachments to the world and paganism; he bravely threw himself on his knees and offered himself to the true God. With the light of faith love was kindled like a furnace in his heart, and he wept for his sins before yet he was baptized. Although the night was now far advanced, he determined to do the request of Alexander, and bring Balbina to him, that they might both be received into the church.

He roused Balbina from the tranquil sleep of innocence, and with many tears told her what had passed; how he had given his

\* This miracle is similar to that of *bi-location* we read of in the lives of several modern saints—St. Francis of Jerome, St. Philip Neri, St. Liguori, and others mentioned in the "Acts of Canonization."

word the moment she was cured to destroy all the idols in his house, and give himself, with his friend Hermes, to the faith of Christianity.

Balbina was one of those tender flowers that bloom in secret and give their fragrance to the few that pass near. She lost her mother in her younger days, but found everything in a kind, indulgent father. The deformity of her neck obliged her to live a retired life, to avoid the unkind scoff that ever flowed from the lips of a people strangers to the sublime laws of charity. Without knowing it she was thus preserved from the foul corruption that blasted every sentiment of modesty in the maiden heart in pagan society, and Providence, that never sends an affliction without a blessing, destined the innocent and untainted Balbina to be indeed a flower—one of the fairest in the garden of the church—worthy to be transplanted to the celestial garden to please the great Eternal Gardener with the fragrance of her chastity. With joy and hope that filled her innocent heart, in artless vanity she heard from her father she was to be made as fair as other maidens. Quickly she rose and put on her

colobion, selected hurriedly a few ornaments, and bade her slave attend her.

Her father wrapt his toga over his military dress, and led Balbina by the hand. They hastened through the stately palaces on the Aventine to the Forum. The night was dark, and few were to be met in the abandoned streets at that late hour. Quirinus stepped quickly, for his heart was aglow with enthusiasm, and even silent tears stole down his cheeks to relieve internal emotions. Strange ! the brave colonel had fear. Not that he feared the steps he was taking were leading him to the ruin of his temporal position ; not that he dreaded the indignation of a heartless tyrant who would torture him to death ; but he was afraid that, having the misfortune to imprison the anointed of God, the Divine judgment might fall on him before he had set Alexander free. Such fear he expressed in the first words he spoke to the holy bishop in the dungeon of the Mamertine. We must enter the prison once more with the father and child. Some interesting scenes will pass here before the dawn of the morning.

The Mamertine was a large building with

many apartments. Besides the underground dungeons which still exist there were cells and chambers for criminals of minor guilt; moreover, the governor of the prison had special apartments for his own use: there was the audience-room, the secretary, and even private rooms where he could reside at pleasure. But as the position of governor of the prison was one of great trust, it was conferred only on wealthy and independent men; they generally lived in a sumptuous palace in the more senatorial parts of the city. Thus it was with Quirinus; he led Balbina to one of the private apartments, whilst he would go seek in the lower prison the man of God, whom he now loves and fears more than he had that morning ill-treated and despised.

Leaving Balbina with her slave he hurried off to the prison. He found the guards he had placed awake and watching; he asked if they had heard any noise. They replied in the negative. He then unlocked the massive iron bars that closed the passage in the rock down to the lower prison, and, by means of a ladder, descended to Alexander. Whilst the holy Pontiff greeted him

with his usual amiable smile, Quirinus threw himself at his feet, and, trembling with a great fervor of feeling, said, "Pray, father, oh! pray, I beseech thee, that the anger of God, of whom thou art a bishop, may not overtake me in my sins."

Alexander, delighted at this fervent indication of grace that had entered the heart of the tribune, bidding him rise, mildly replied, "Our God does not wish the destruction of any one, but that sinners be converted. When they placed Him on the cross, he prayed even for his executioners."

Then Quirinus informed him that Balbina had come, and awaited in one of the upper apartments of the prison. The holy Pope bade him take the iron collar from his neck, and put it around Balbina's neck, but the father begged and prayed he would come and do it himself. Quirinus removed all his chains, and, carrying the collar with him, they commenced to ascend to the upper prisons.

Whilst Alexander and Quirinus were thus engaged, Balbina was also strangely occupied. She was reclining on a couch, pondering over the strange things her father

had told her concerning the Christians, and feelings of awe were insensibly creeping over her timid heart. Perhaps she felt the agonizing anticipation experienced by those who sit in the anteroom of a surgeon's study awaiting their turn to undergo some painful operation. Perhaps the spirits of evil summoned to her memory the horrible legends of mysterious arts supposed to be practised by the Christians in dark underground cellars, colored with all the thrilling details of bloody and cruel carousals attributed to their assemblies; or perhaps the joy of being speedily cured drove away every girlish fear, and filled her mind with bright pictures of nuptials, convivial gatherings, and all the tinsel that flatters human vanity. Whilst thus a thousand thoughts and fancies were playing on her youthful imagination, she perceives the door slowly opening, then a beautiful light, and in the midst of an aureola of surpassing brightness she saw a little boy running towards her. He was the same that brought Alexander to her father's house. A more beautiful child Balbina never looked on; her eyes were riveted. Her first impulse was to embrace and kiss

the lovely strange child ; he had his burning torch still in his hand, and, approaching the amazed girl, called her by her name, and, in the sweet little voice of a child, said :

“ Balbina, you will be cured, but remain in thy virginity, and I will show you a Spouse whose love for you made him shed his blood.” Saying this he disappeared, leaving Balbina frightened at the strange vision, and the room seemed dark as if the lamp were extinguished, so brilliant was the light shed around him.\*

Whilst rapt in amazement, her eyes dazzling like one who had gazed on the sun and was aroused from a pleasant dream, her father, accompanied by the venerable Pontiff, entered the apartment. She rose with becoming grace as a Roman child to salute her father, but the veneration and awe inspired by the halo of sanctity that shrouded the Christian bishop walking beside her father lent confusion to her agitated feelings. The gentle smile of Alexander won her con-

\* “ Ecce puer ille subito cum facula apparuit et venit ad pul-  
ellam dicens ei, ‘ Balbina salva eris et in virginitate tua per-  
mane et ego te faciam videre sponsum tuum qui pro amore  
tuo sanguinem suum fudit.’ Hæc cum dixisset abscessit,  
etc.”—*Acts, cap. iii.*

fidence, and, in a kind, paternal reproof, said to her, “Don’t be frightened, my child, we are going to make you a prisoner, but a prisoner in bonds of love”—words whose spiritual meaning, perhaps, she did not know then, but which fell with the sweets of hope on a heart that was a stranger to earthly affections.

Alexander, who knew that God had destined miracles for the conversion of a blinded people, was anxious that the glory of the true God might be known in the power he gave to man by all who were then in prison in the different cells of the Mamertine. Therefore, seating himself near Balbina, he asked Quirinus, “How many prisoners have you under your care here?”

“Twenty-five,” he replied.\*

“Go and see,” continued Alexander, “if there be any Christians amongst them.”

But Quirinus, in a natural desire to see Balbina cured, suggested before he would go Alexander would fulfil his promise towards his afflicted child. He complied with the request, and placed the iron collar on the neck of Balbina; the father, smiling with joy and

\* Usuard has one hundred and twenty-five.

rattling the heavy keys, went off to rouse his sleeping victims to make a demand that, in the dreadful time of persecution, sounded with a thrill of horror: "Are there any Christians amongst you?" Whilst Quirinus, having left his daughter with the collar fastened, passed with the guards through the chambers of sighs,\* rousing perhaps from dreams of liberty and prosperity some hapless children of misfortune, Alexander was pouring streams of heavenly light into the soul of Balbina. Like the diamond, rough and dull, covered with earth when first lifted from its crystal cell, becoming brilliant and bright in the hands of the jeweller, so the words of the bishop brightened that clouded, beautiful soul of Balbina, and made it reflect, in all its dazzling purity, the light of eternal truth. The charming child that was the prophet of her mysterious nuptials, the allusions to the bonds of love that were to make her a happy prisoner of Jesus, flashed with grace to her memory and were easily understood. There are moments when the soul bursting with emotion can only express itself in tears; and Balbina, whose innocent

\* "Cellæ gemituum."

heart was as tender as the leaf of the sensitive plant, gave vent in tears to the dawn of Christian joy that flooded her soul.

“ Does the iron collar hurt your neck, my child ? ” we fancy we hear the venerable Pontiff mildly enquire.

“ Oh ! no, good Christian ! ‘Tis softer than a necklet of dew-drops gathered from the rose-leaf ; ‘tis lighter than my mother’s hand when first she dressed the wound.”

“ And when thy neck shall be as fair as the tinted marble, how cheerfully wilt thou bear the ruby necklet thy Spouse has destined for thee amongst the treasures of his love ! ” suggested Alexander.

She little dreamed then that Alexander referred to the red and bloody gash of the executioner’s axe, which, received for the faith, is the richest ornament the maiden neck can bear.

Outside they hear the step of Quirinus, the rattling of keys, and the sound of other voices, and, entering, Quirinus announced to Alexander he had “ found two Christians, who were also priests, amongst the prisoners ; they were called Eventuus and Theodulus ; the latter, they say, has come from the East.”

Alexander, desiring to see them, Quirinus called them in. They cast themselves at the feet of their Pontiff, and embrace him with holy joy.

A few words of explanation followed. These holy priests were sent from the East, as was customary with Trajan, that they might be put to death before the Roman people to deter them in the capital from embracing Christianity. Eventuus was an old, feeble man, gray-headed, and trembling under a venerable old age. Theodulus was in the bloom of his manhood, but ripe in virtue and heroic sanctity. It is probable they had never seen the Holy Father until that night, and as love and reverence towards the Holy See — a characteristic virtue of the early Christians — ever glowed brighter as the hour of trial was darker, we can fancy what joy filled the hearts of those noble exiles as they prostrated themselves to kiss the feet of the Vicar of Jesus Christ.

In proportion as faith is warm and pure it turns with filial confidence to the pilot of our storm-tossed bark; neither oceans, nor deserts, nor impassable mountains can break the union of the Catholic with the visible

head of the Church. He may be like his Master, persecuted, concealed in dismal catacombs, consigned to a loathsome dungeon, or in chains on his way to martyrdom; still faith recognizes the Vicar of Jesus Christ, and is fanned to greater fervor in the feeling of sympathy in which it participates in his wrongs. Eventuus and Theodulus forgot every pain in the joy of being in such holy company. Quirinus shares in their joy, for he who confers happiness on others feels the blessing rebound, like an echo, to its cause.

But greater joy is yet in store for the noble tribune. Balbina, who was still reclining on her couch and with the heavy iron collar of a criminal on her neck, silently watched what was passing. Catching the eye of her father, she beckoned for him to come towards her. A cheerful smile playing around her lips, she told him her neck was cured. He removed the iron, and his eyes feasted for a moment on the lovely form of his child. Not a trace of the deformity was left: the proud father could boast of the fairest daughter in Rome. Filled with emotion, he embraced Balbina, and, in rushing towards Alexander, threw himself on his knees, and cried out:

"O holy men! leave the prison before the anger of God falls on me!" In deep gratitude he offered not only liberty but wealth and earthly rewards to the venerable Pontiff, but prayed first for baptism for himself and Balbina.

Alexander, placing his hand affectionately on his shoulder, bade him rise, then, looking seriously towards him, said:

"Quirinus, if you wish to reward me for the favor I have, through our Lord Jesus Christ, conferred on Balbina, bring all the prisoners you have here, and let them become Christians."

"Ah! you Christians are good," said Quirinus; "but these prisoners are thieves, murderers, and perjured villains steeped in crime. Will you contaminate yourself by having intercourse with such wretches?"

"Yes, Quirinus," rejoined the holy father mildly; "we are ministers of Him who came to call poor sinners. Bring them to me."

Quirinus assented. He called one of the guards, and gave orders to have all brought to his presence. A few minutes, and the room is filled with a motley crew—the outcasts of

society, hapless victims of unbridled passion, hands stained with blood, thoughts burning with futile desires, and hearts hardened with vice; yet He who feasted with sinners, who came to call them, and whose angels rejoice on their return, can make that which is red as crimson white as snow, and that which is dark as blood pure as wool.

Alexander addressed his fellow-prisoners with thrilling eloquence. The writer of the "Acts" has given us an epitome of what he thought Alexander said. We need not tarry over his appeal; the dread mysteries of Christianity were the theme of this eloquent sermon over the dungeon of the Mamertine. Suffice it to say, all who listened were converted, and, probably, that night, whilst Rome was yet buried in sleep and the dawn breaking through the gray clouds of the east, Quirinus, Balbina, the prisoners, and keepers of the Mamertine were all received into the bosom of Christianity and washed with the saving waters of baptism. The prison, the "Acts" say, became like a church—the nearest thing we could have this side of the grave to the kiss of justice with peace.

## IV.

DURING the proceedings we have just described, there was one of the officials of the prison—a secretary to Quirinus—who stood aloof, and, in a hardened heart, was grumbling at the orders of the tribune. Early the next morning he hurried off to the palace of Aurelian, the procurator of Adrian, to tell his story. A body of soldiers were immediately marched to the Martine to seize Quirinus.

Perhaps in the tomes of the Bollandists, amongst the records of the undaunted soldiers of Christ before the tribunals of the pagans, we may not find a more fearless hero than the brave Quirinus. The boldness with which he addressed Aurelian is interesting.

"Quirinus," said Aurelian, "I have ever treated you as a son, and now, allowing yourself to be deceived by that Christian Alexander, you enrage me against you."

Quirinus, in a bold voice, replied: "I have become a Christian; you may kill me, flog me, or burn me; I'll not be anything else! Moreover, I made all who were in the prison

become Christians, and I gave them leave to go away, and they would not; especially the holy Pope Alexander and the illustrious Hermes, and they refused to go. The prisoners said to me that, as they had to give their lives for their crimes, how much more would they now give them for the name of Christ! I certainly asked all that were baptized to go where they would, but instead of availing themselves of their liberty they are now voluntarily awaiting in prison the death you will give them, like persons famished with hunger waiting for the most delicious feast. So, whatever you have a mind to do with me, commence at once."

Aurelian, filled with indignation, nevertheless listened till Quirinus had finished, and then, turning to one of the lictors, said, "Cut out the tongue of this man who has the audacity to speak to us thus"—turning towards Quirinus—"and then perhaps you will hold your peace whilst we torment you on the rack."

The order was executed in his presence, and Quirinus was stretched on the rack. Nevertheless, God gave him the power of speech, and, taunting the tyrant for his cruelty,

said, "Miserable and unhappy man! think of thy soul in time, lest you sink into eternal pain." These are the last words recorded of Quirinus. The judge ordered his hands and feet to be cut off, and then to be decapitated on the Appian Way. He was drawn on a wagon by six oxen to the place of his martyrdom. The precise spot is unknown, but we may safely conjecture it was at the temple of Mars—and therefore another amongst the hallowed reminiscences around the "Domine quo vadis?" His holy remains were to be exposed on the highway as food for the dogs, the Christians removed them to the Catacombs of St. Prætextatus, which were near. Thus ended the career of the noble tribune, who, about the same hour on the preceding evening, was abusing Hermes for his folly in becoming a Christian. He not only became one himself, but a saint and a martyr.

## V.

## THE CHAINS OF ST. PETER.

WHILST the Christians were carrying to the Catacombs the yet warm remains of the brave Quirinus, strange events were passing at the Mamertine. Balbina, in all the fulness of joy that had burst on her soul like long forgotten sunshine, still unconscious of the awful death of her father, sat near the venerable Pontiff, and listened in breathless attention to his thrilling exhortations; soon her noble heart was throbbing with generous resolve; the vow of perpetual virginity was registered in heaven; with the torch of faith was enkindled the sweet fire of love towards the celestial Spouse promised her by the angelic child she had seen in her vision.

Through reverence and devotion she kissed over and over again the chains that bound Alexander. Alexander, by a divine inspiration, bade her not to kiss his chains, but to seek the chains of St. Peter and kiss them.\* Perhaps the holy Pontiff saw the moment for

\* "Desine hanc bojam osculari sed potius quære Beati Petri vincula et ea osculate."—*Acts, ib.*

recovering the chains of Peter opportune. Her father was chief of the prison; the guards, too, were Christians, and those chains, which had been secreted for fifty years in some part of the prison, could now be easily brought forth and placed in the keeping of the Christians. Balbina rushed to some of the guards, and made them seek with her for those treasures, nor did she cease the search until her zeal and energy was rewarded by finding them.\* She brought them to Alexander. He bade her take them away to her own house, and have them preserved with reverence until the persecution would cease. Those chains have never been lost sight of since; they are preserved in Rome in one of the grandest basilicas in this city of churches. This church is called "St. Peter in Chains." The interesting memories cast around its origin, and its connection with the chains discovered in the Mamertine by Balbina, induce us to leave the holy Pontiff instructing his neophytes in the upper chamber of the prison, whilst we cast a glance at these

\* "Tunc data sibi opera, cum studio ac desiderio magno pervenit ad illa."—*Acts.*

historic relics of the past—the chains of St. Peter.

The shadows of the saints fell with healing power on the sick. Their garments and everything they touched in ordinary use have been honored by God with miraculous powers and treasured by the church as sacred. How much reverence must we not have for those chains which bound in prison the hands that worked miracles, and were stained with the blood of those great servants of God! From the very beginning the Christians manifested their reverence towards the chains of the martyrs, and, often in fear they might pass again into profane use, they were buried with their relics in the Catacombs. Those holy emblems of the suffering children of the church fired the eloquence of Chrysostom, Augustine, and Ambrose. At one time they tell us the chains of the martyrs make the powers of darkness tremble, and banish to their abyss of woe the multitude of the invisible spirits of iniquity that float like atoms in the air to waylay man. “If,” says St. Chrysostom, “I were asked which would give me more pleasure, St. Paul coming out of heaven in glory, or out of

prison in chains, I would prefer the latter." The links of those chains shall shine like suns of glory on the last day; their clanking noise as they brush together will be like music from silver bells; they shall be ornaments for the festive gathering of the just.\*

"Happy chains!" says St. Augustine, "which held the almost fleshless bones and received the perspiration of living blood, which led their victims to the cross more in honor than in guilt."†

Amongst the chains of the martyrs none have been preserved with greater reverence than those of St. Peter. Not only those which bound the apostle in the Mamertine, but also those that fell from his hand and feet at the command of the angel in Jerusalem have been preserved in a magnificent church on the Esquiline, in Rome, for more than fifteen hundred years. It is generally supposed this magnificent church took its origin from the vows of a mother who

\* Chrysostom.

† "Felices catenæ! quæ nudatis pene ossibus inhærentes vivas reliquias de sanguinis sudore jam attrita carne rapuerunt; felicia vincula! quæ reum usque ad Christi crucem non tam condemnatum quam consecratum miserunt," etc.—*Augustine, Serm. 39, De Sanctis.*

sought a certain son-in-law for her daughter.  
It happened thus:

Eudoxia, wife of Theodosius the Second, Emperor of the East, who flourished in the first half of the fifth century, desired to have her daughter Eudossia married to Valentian III., the youthful Emperor of the West. Being a virtuous, pious queen, she made a vow, if it pleased God to grant her wish, she would, amongst other works of piety, make a pilgrimage to the holy places in Jerusalem. Her wishes were granted. Her daughter was married to Valentian. Eudoxia fulfilled her vow, and started for Jerusalem. We have met some author who states that Eudoxia made this vow to have her daughter freed from some malady; but certain it is she went to Jerusalem, and conferred great favors on the population of that city. She rebuilt the walls, endowed several monasteries, and erected a beautiful Church to St. Stephen. In return for these favors, the inhabitants gave her the chains of St. Peter—those which fell from his hands and feet when led from the prison of Herod by the angel. These chains were preserved with great reverence by the people, and a

constant and sacred tradition, and afterwards miracles, proved them to be the real chains of the apostle, although we have not been able to find where they were preserved during the siege and burning of the city by Titus. They were given to Eudoxia about the year 432. Returning to Constantinople, she gave half of these chains to the church of St. Peter in that city; the other half she sent to her daughter Eudossia at Rome. This holy queen, equally grateful to God for the realization of her anxious hopes, and in reverence to the treasure sent her, rebuilt the church on the Esquiline, and dedicated it to the title of "St. Peter in Chains."\*

When the chains sent from Jerusalem arrived in Rome, they were brought by

\* "Quæ quidem ex voto fecisse videtur. Sunt igitur et præsertim inter recensiores scriptores qui dicant sacram hanc ædem circa dimidium quinti sæculi ab Eudoxia Valentiniani tertii uxore fuisse constructam, atque eo etiam tempore propætrea quod S. Petri Catenæ in eam delatæ fuerunt, ad vincula nuncupatam, Ita Pompeius, Ugonius, Baronius (an. 439), Pancirolius (page 210), Donatus, Ciaconius, Cornelius à Lapide, Martinellus, Bailletus, Boldetus, et alii," etc. Extract from Monsacratii, *De Catenis S. Petri*, chap. ii. p. 13.—For the history and preservation of the Jerusalem chains, see also Monsacratii, who gives an extract from an ancient Greek writer, quoted by Metaphraste, Surius, and Combefisius, chap. i. p. 7.

Eudossia to Sixtus III. In the hands of this holy Pontiff the two chains became miraculously united, as they may be seen to the present day. This strange fact, though often ridiculed by heretical writers, is given by such grave authorities as Ambrosé, Baronius (anno 439), Petrus de Natalibus, Ugonius, Panciroli, and others.\*

Sigebert relates in his *Chronica* under the date 969, when Otho, the Emperor of Germany, was in Rome, one of his courtiers was possessed by the devil, so that in the presence of all the people he commenced to bite and tear the flesh off his arms. He was brought, by the order of the emperor, to Pope John XXIII., that he might be touched by the chains of St. Peter. When the priests applied to the possessed false chains of the apostle, the demon but tortured him more—there was no remedy where there was no reverence; but when the real chains were brought, howling and inflicting fearful contortions, the demon left the body. There was a holy bishop named Deodericus present at this scene, who was so struck with the power of the holy relics, that he seized

\* Monsecrati, p. 37.

the chains, protesting he would not let them go until a portion of them were given to him. The Pope, at the request of the emperor, gave him one of the links of the chain.

It was the custom of the popes to have links of those chains cast into gold keys, which were laid on the tomb of the apostle and then sent as great favors to princes. Gregory the Great, sending one of these keys to some knights of the Court of Mauritius, relates that one of these keys was found in a city of Lombardy; and some one, wishing to convert the gold into some other use, seized a knife and proceeded to break the key to pieces. He had scarcely raised his hand to strike when the knife was forcibly taken out of his hand by some invisible power and plunged into his throat, and he immediately fell dead.\* When Autharith, the king of the Lombards, together with his courtiers, saw this man lying in his blood, and the key beside him, they were seized with great fear, and refused to raise

\* "Qui mox cultellum cum quo eam (clavem) per partes mittere voluit arreptus per spiritum sibi in guttere defixit, eademque hora defunctus cecidit."—*Epis.*, lib. 6, epis. 23.

the key. They sent for a holy man named Minulfus, who placed it in the reliquary.

In memory of this miracle, Autharith ordered another gold key to be cast and sent to Pope Pelagius II.

Mabillon, in the "Acts of the Benedictine Order," relates how the holy Abbot Adson, of the Monastery of Vitriacus, cured the Count Heribert by the water in which he had washed some links of the chain of St. Peter.\*

## VI.

### MARTYRDOM OF ALEXANDER, EVENTUUS, AND THEODULUS.

WHILST Balbina was hurrying to her home with her treasure, the soldiers had come to the Mamertine and seized Alexander, Eventuus, and Theodulus, together with all the prisoners. She was thus preserved to spend a few days longer amid the sorrows of life and prepare for a glorious crown, which God would give her in His own time.

When they arrived at the tribunal of Au-

\* Tom. 2, No. 13, p. 816.

relian, the prisoners were first disposed of. They suffered a cruel but glorious martyrdom. They were placed on board an old, leaky ship, with their hands tied together, and thus sent out to sea. How long they survived on "the wild waste of waters" it is impossible to say; but the ocean guards their precious relics in some secluded cavern far down in its fathomless waters, and will give them up on the last day—a bright, shining band amongst the innumerable victims of her watery graves. The Church honors them on the 10th of April, as it is supposed it was on this day, in the year 132 (according to Baronius), they were sent to sea.

Alexander and the two priests were now summoned to the tribunal of the impious Aurelian. The scene was such as we might expect from the intrepid and eloquent Christians, and the impotent rage of the confounded judge.

"Before we enter into other matters," said Aurelian, "tell me some of the mysteries of your sect; for I can't understand how you prefer to die rather than be persuaded."

"What you ask," replied Alexander, "is holy, and not to be given to dogs."

"What! Am I, then, a dog?" shouted Aurelian, already reddened with rage.

"Indeed," said Alexander, "you are worse than a dog, for a poor dog ceases to live when he dies, and will not be cast into eternal torments for his crimes."

"Do you not know, if you do not answer my questions properly, I can have you beaten with rods?"

"Aurelian, tyrant as you are, why do you with such rash presumption ask such things from me, who, besides the Eternal King, who is in heaven, fears no other? You err if you think of seeking information from Christian men without the intention of believing."

"Cease thy loquacious sophistry," said Aurelian, assuming a great air of importance. "It is not to an ordinary judge thou art speaking, but to one whose power the whole world feels."

"Do not boast of your power, for it will not last long." Alexander spoke as if the divine Light had permitted him to see the awful end that was making haste to come on the impious Aurelian.

The judge then said: "Thus you dare

speak because you know that presently you will be torn with torments."

Alexander smiled. "That will not be anything new," he replied; "for what innocent person was ever known to escape thy injustice? They only are permitted by you to enjoy life who deny our Lord Jesus Christ; and, as I am firmly resolved, by his grace, not to deny him, I will have to suffer death at thy hands, like Hermes, that holy man who is now indeed illustrious, and Quirinus, who is now a tribune in the celestial kingdom, and, like others who have been illumined in the faith, whom thou hast sent to their eternal crown.

"And why," asked Aurelian, "do you all prefer to be killed? I have asked you this already."

"And I have told you that we don't give holy things to dogs.

"Again you say I am a dog? That's enough. The licitor's rods are at hand."

"I don't fear your stripes," said Alexander. "They give a short-lived pain, and then are forgotten; but I fear torments you do not seem to fear, but which you will one day feel"

The passion of Aurelian, like the stream, stopped for awhile by some impediment, at length bursts its dam and sweeps along with greater violence, was now an irresistible torrent of fury. Scourges, racks, and red-hot plates, and all the painful ministers of impotent rage, were ordered for the great Pontiff. In silence and prayer the brave Alexander allowed them do with his body what they wished. So great was his patience that, while they were dislocating his bones on the rack, he did not as much as utter a groan. Aurelian, wishing to get some sign of agony that would gratify the insatiable cruelty of his heart, at length said to his victim : "Why don't you speak ? "

Alexander, as calmly as if making his morning meditation in his private oratory, replied : "Because in the time of prayer the Christian is speaking with his God."

"Answer all that I ask you, and I will make them cease to torture you."

"Fool ! I despise your torments, and fear not the worst of your cruelty."

"You should consider you are still young, and may have many years of life."

Alexander did not reply to this, but, after

a moment, said: "Would that you think of your soul and save it!"

Amongst the spectators at this cruel scene was the wife of Aurelian. Touched with a natural feminine sympathy, and perhaps, too, converted in her heart by the firmness of the holy martyr, she sent one of her pages over to Aurelian, saying: "Save thyself, and dismiss this holy man. Otherwise you will die a bad death and leave me a widow."

Looking towards her with a frown, he said, in a loud voice: "Perhaps you are a friend of his, that you speak thus!?"\*

Nevertheless he gave the order to have the holy bishop removed from the rack, and in the meantime had the two priests, Even-tuus and Theodulus, brought before him.

Who has not heard of the true and safe principle that "a good action is never lost"? A cup of cold water given in the name of Jesus has its reward in heaven; and even where man is ungrateful and forgets the

\* "Et cum esset in aquuleo suspensus misit ad Aurelianum uxor ejus dicens: Libera et dimitte istum sanctum quia et tu mala morte moriturus es et me viduam derelinques. Aurelianus dixit: Nonne amicus tuus es et ideo talia verba pro ipso loqueris?"—*Acts, ib.*

services rendered, God will vindicate. The sympathy of Severina towards the suffering martyr gained for her the light of faith, and with it a crown of glory.

Eventuus and Theodulus are now brought in. All eyes are turned towards them, and a murmur of sympathy passes through the hall. Eventuus is a feeble old man, supported by a stick, and leaning on the arm of his younger companion. The snows of eighty years have whitened his locks, and his whole frame trembles with age and debility. Yet the imprisoned soul, that never grows old, was as vigorous and brave as when it animated the blooming youth of twenty. His vivid, bright eye and feeble efforts to move quickly to the tribunal showed the joy with which he awaited the glorious death that would burst the bonds of his earthly prison and close his protracted exile. Of the early history of those brave martyrs we know nothing, and that only is preserved for us which is given in the interesting "Acts of Alexander."

Turning once more towards Alexander, he said to him: "Tell me, Alexander, who are these?"

The Pontiff replied : "They are both holy men and priests."

"How do you call yourself?" said Aurelian, looking fiercely at Eventuus.

"In my carnal name I am called Eventuus; in my spiritual name I am a Christian!"

"And when did you become a Christian?"

"Seventy years ago. I was baptized at the age of eleven; at twenty I was made a priest; and now I am eighty-one years old, and the last year, thanks to God, I have spent in prison for his holy name."

"You ought to take pity on your old age," said Aurelian. "Deny that Christ is your God, and I will give you riches and make you a noble."

Eventuus, with the greatest indignation, replied: "Are you mad? I thought you knew something, but I see what a fool you are. Blind and hard-hearted, you will not understand what your false gods are. Know, then, at length, miserable man, that you are mortal like all other men. Do penance and believe in Christ, the Son of the true God, that you may also find his mercy!"

Aurelian, seeing there was little hope of gaining anything from such a veteran soldier of the Cross, had him put on one side, and turned towards Theodulus.

"Then you are Theodulus, who has also dared to despise my orders?"

"And I shall continue to do so, and to despise yourself too, who thus lacerate the innocent Christians," replied Theodulus, with Christian firmness equal to the bravery of his undaunted companion. "What has Alexander done to you that you should ill-treat him thus?"

Then Aurelian said: "Do you think that you will escape?"

He replied: "I hope, in the mercy of God, I shall not be separated from them."

Aurelian, with diabolical cruelty, determined what sort of death to give those brave champions of the Christian faith. They were to be thus disposed of. Alexander and Eventuus were to be tied back to back, and thus cast into a burning furnace, whilst Theodulus was to be allowed to look on, that the awful death of the others might shake his resolution and make him a convert to the absurdities of paganism. The execution-

ers were not long preparing the dreadful instrument of torture.\* But the holy martyrs were filled with holy joy rather than fear. The impious Aurelian waited to see the thrilling sight that was to gratify his inhuman cruelty. At length the furnace roars in blazing fury; the holy martyrs are tied; they are flung in. Alexander, filled with a holy joy, cried out to Theodulus: "Brother Theodulus, hasten and come in here with us, and we shall be like the three children of Israel; and even the fourth, who sang with them, is here with us now." Theodulus sprang with a light heart into the furnace, and they all three sang together portions of the Psalms of David. Their voices mingled with the hoarse roar of the devouring flames, but ascended as the sweetest music to the throne of God.† Not a hair of their heads was touched by the

\* "Tunc Aurelianus jussit fortiter incendi furnum et jussit Alexandrum et Eventuum dorsum ad dorsum ligari et sic præcipitari in futurum candentes.—*Acts.*

† "S. Alexander clamavit dicens: Frater Theodule, festina venire huc et age nobiscum; . . . ille quartus qui inter tres pueros Hæbræos apparuit nunc hic nobiscum est. Et exiliens in ignem S. Theodulus ingressus est furnum."—*Acts, ib.*

flames. The hand of that God who protected the children of Israel in their furnace was not shortened. He was also the God of the martyrs.

The tyrant was so confounded, he groaned in his rage, and, straitened in fury, ordered Eventuus and Theodulus to be beheaded, and Alexander to be pierced all over with sharp-pointed instruments. Thus these holy martyrs passed to their crown.

But the triumph of passion is short-lived. The warnings given to the impious Aurelian were not in vain. The moment the happy souls of the martyrs had fled, gratified in his imagined triumph, he made use of some scoffing expression over the bleeding and palpitating remains of his victims. Suddenly he heard a terrible voice from some unseen person, which, calling him by his name, said: "Those whom you mock are carried to the delights of heaven; for you is opened a dungeon in hell." \*

The impious judge trembled with fear.

\* "Cumque eis quasi mortuis insultaret, vox facta est repente de cœlo dicens: Aureliane istis quibus insultas apertus est paradisus deliciarum; tibi autem apertus est tartarus et infernus."—*Acts*.

He hurried home, where fresh terrors awaited him. Like the mysterious hand that announced destruction in the banquet-hall of Baltassar, a flaming scourge was brought by an invisible power, and cast at the feet of the terrified Aurelian. He called Severina, and begged of her to pray to her God for him; but her heart was already converted to the true God of the Christians, and, seeing he deserved the judgment that had come on him, she fearlessly declared she would go and look after the bodies of the martyrs, that their prayers might save her from the just judgment of God.\* She had their bodies carried to her own vineyard, seven miles outside of Rome on the Via Nomentana, and procured that the exequies should be performed with becoming solemnity.

On her return she found Aurelian raging mad. Uttering the most horrible blasphemies, and biting his tongue with rage, he gave up his soul to the demons, who were waiting to carry it in triumph to the regions of woe, prepared for the persecutors of the Church of God.

\* “Severina vero dixit ei: ‘Ego vadam et per me sepeliam eos ne et mihi similiter contingat.’”—*Acts.*

Severina clothed herself in mourning garments, and remained day and night before the tombs of the martyrs until Sixtus, who was appointed by the Roman clergy to succeed the deceased Pontiff, had arrived from the East. At her request a church was erected, and a bishop appointed to take care of the district in which was the town of Nomentum. All mention of this episcopate died away in the fourth century, but the ruins of Nomentum are still to be seen at the modern town of Lamentano.

At what time Hermes was put to death is not certain, as Aurelian had him strangled privately in the Mamertine, for fear of tumult amongst his slaves and friends. Nor yet have we anything certain of Balbina. One MS., which seems to be the most authentic, mentions, before going to martyrdom, she gave the chains of St. Peter to Theodora, the sister of Hermes, and this MS., which says, "et necata est," does not record the particulars of her glorious end. A church has been erected to her name on the Aventine.

VII.

DISCOVERY OF THE TOMB OF ALEXANDER.

FROM scenes that took place in the second century, we pass to events of our own days, connected with the great martyr Alexander. From the fifth successor of St. Peter, who was dragged from the Mamertine to martyrdom, we come to contemplate an interesting scene in the lifetime of the illustrious Pontiff, Pius IX., who, 1741 years afterwards, sits in the same chair of St. Peter. The discovery of the tomb and Catacombs of Alexander, the visit of Pius IX. to this venerable shrine, and the accident which nearly deprived the world of its greatest man, are now facts of history.

We read in the "Acts of Alexander" that Severina had their precious remains brought to her own vineyard, at the seventh mile outside the Nomentan gate. She procured from Sixtus, the next Pope, permission to build a sanctuary over their relics, and a bishop was appointed for the district. In the wars and desolation of after-centuries, this church was ruined, and in the commencement

of the ninth century Paschal the First brought the relics of the martyrs from the Catacombs to the churches of Rome. As the principal attraction was taken away, the shrine was abandoned; ten centuries of decay and change had swept all traces of the church away. Near the seventh mile there stood a few solitary masses of brickwork, the only ruins of the past to be found within miles of the place, and here antiquarians naturally placed the sanctuary and Catacombs of Alexander, especially as in excavations made in the place a portion of a cemetery was really found, and bodies of martyrs were transferred thence to Rome.\* However, in the beginning of the year 1855, some men were making excavations in the vineyard belonging to the Propaganda, and accidentally discovered a stair leading to subterranean passages. The directors employed by the Propaganda to proceed with the works perceived as they advanced the spoils of pagan monuments promiscuously employed in the works, and at once concluded they had fallen on some ancient Christian sanctuary. Nor

\* Boldetti, "Sopra i Cimiteri de Santi Martiri," book ii. ch. 18.

were they disappointed, for they suddenly entered the area of what was once a magnificent edifice, columns of granite, mosaic pavements, an altar of the richest marble, and inscriptions that left no doubt whatsoever they had discovered the long-lost tomb of Alexander.

The devotion that attracted the Christians around the tombs of the martyrs seventeen centuries ago is still fresh and green in the Church of God. Thousands flocked to this venerable sanctuary, as a precious memento of the suffering pioneers of the early Church, and claimed the tomb of the great Pontiff as another link in the great archæological chain which proves the present church united with the past. Pius IX. was invited by the Directors of the Propaganda to visit the shrine, and on the 12th of April the venerable Pontiff, surrounded by cardinals, bishops, and some military commanders, then in Rome, proceeded to the scene of this interesting discovery. Some of the students of the Urban College were gathered in the vineyard to meet his Holiness. The procession moved into the old basilica, which now formed a beautiful sight; the rich colors of the

purpled prelates contrasted with the dark walls of the abandoned church. The holy father paused at each inscription—the names of the young and beautiful, who had fallen early victims to the fell destroyer, and the aged who had fought the good fight, whose spirits were in peace. Some of the inscriptions were very touching. There was the rude slab, the palm and crown, and near the little phial of blood, blushing with its crimson treasure. On one we read, “Silvina is now with Alexander.” On another, “Appollon, dedicated to God, died in his 14th year.” Here Pascarius the deacon sleeps peacefully, there the faithful Sparinga awaits the angel’s trumpet; another is swept away: “POST . VARIAS . CURAS . POST . LONGAE . MONIA . VITAE.”

Arrived at the centre of the basilica, the holy father knelt at the foot of the altar on whose porphyry slab the unbloody sacrifice was offered to God in the second century. The students of the Propaganda were gathered round, and one of them read in a clear voice the following invitation in verse:

“Ingridere, Alme Parens, squalentibus excita saxis,  
Heroum Christi, claraque busta vide.  
Pastor Alexander, pro Religionis amore  
Hic moriens, sparsit sanguine membra sua.  
Qui, viden? elapsus cœlo palmisque decorus  
Ducet inoffenso Te pede per latebras.  
Nec mirum; socios inter concordia regnat;  
Tu comitem invisus, obvius alter ad est.”

The Holy Father proceeded to the pontifical chair in the choir, his heart aglow with the spirit of the place, and, in that aptitude of word and thought so remarkable in the sayings of this saintly Pontiff, he poured forth a stream of eloquence that melted the hearts of the happy few that were present—like the brave and venerable pontiffs of old, who, in the stormy days of persecution, sat in the same chair and encouraged their trembling flocks to feel the warming sun of hope in the midst of their darkness, to bear their trials patiently till the dawn of the eternal peace that was never clouded. Truly, the Acts of the Martyrs read in the thrilling monograms on the surrounding tombs, and the memories of the persecutions that drove life into the sepulchres of the dead, was a theme full of emotion for the Pontiff who guided the storm-tossed but indestructible bark, still

floating on the troubled waters of time—a Pontiff who had just returned from exile, and who even then felt the cold blast of the north wind, indicating other storms and more persecution for the Church. With eyes bedewed with tears, with arms stretched towards heaven, he prayed to that God, who was never invoked in vain from the crypts of the Catacombs, for courage and strength, like his martyred predecessors, to guide the Church in its dark hour of her trial—to thwart the machinations of the impious, who were at that moment plotting his ruin in the capitals of Europe.

Having ordered some of the recesses to be opened, he kissed, with reverence, the relics of the martyrs, and returned to the Church of St. Agnes on the way to the city, little dreaming of the casualty that awaited him before the sun would set on that eventful day.

As only a few of the students were allowed to meet the Holy Father at the Catacombs, it was arranged he should receive the college in the Monastery of the Canon Regulars attached to the Church of St. Agnes. A temporary throne was erected in one of the

upper chambers, and here the students were introduced one by one, the rector of the college declaring their names and missions. At length, one hundred and twenty persons had gathered in the room. Suddenly there was heard a creak in the beams underneath, and another moment the floor with its precious and living weight was precipitated into the ground apartment—a lumber room, filled with old casks, chairs, beams, and every species of rubbish. The confusion for the moment was terrible; a cloud of dust rose from the débris that blinded and suffocated. The Pope, Cardinals, and Bishops, military commanders, and students of the Propaganda, all were huddled together in every variety of position. Although the fall was nineteen feet, no one was seriously injured. Six students were somewhat wounded, but in six days all were up and well. The accident is commemorated by a painting on the walls of the room where it happened. The fallen floor has never been restored, and the room preserved as a monument of this miraculous preservation of a number of precious lives.

Further discoveries were made at the tomb of Alexander, and, through the exertions of

the Congregation of the Propaganda, a handsome church has been built on the spot where the ancient Basilica stood, consecrated by the Holy Father. This place may now suggest some interesting memories in the eventful life of this great Pontiff.

Could anything more touchingly prove to us that the spirit of the Church, in reverencing the tombs of the martyrs, is the same now as in the days of its infancy? Around these holy shrines the Church grew, was multiplied and strengthened. Though simple and rude their structure, they were sacred and loved. Some frescoes, the work of untutored hands; wooden crosses, raised at intervals like landmarks in the sombre regions of the dead; some pale lights shedding their rays on the crowds of the faithful who came to implore the intercession of the Martyrs before being martyrs themselves; some vases of perfumes and flowers, were the only magnificence found around the first altars of the Christians. The Church grew like a night flower that loves the shade; but the seed was sown; it cast roots secretly, like the acorn concealed under the surface; the soil, enriched by the remains of the saints, and moistened

by their blood, willingly received it. When this religion of the populace, as the Roman governors used to call Christianity, ascended the throne of the Cæsars, and gave its cross as a standard to the legions, it did not forget the humble altars at which it had worshipped, nor the saints and martyrs whom it had invoked in secrecy and silence in the days of its tribulation. Altars and temples of magnificence sprang up as the expressions of gratitude and reverence; those tombs and shrines have for the most part been preserved for us through the wreck, the storms, the ruin of ages; but where a martyr's tomb has been lost, buried in the débris of fallen ruins, and discovered in our days, it is drawn from its oblivion, the people flock to it again as in the centuries of old, the pilgrim kneels at the renovated altar, the saint is invoked, and the dread sacrifice of expiation sanctifies once more the forgotten shrine. Thus the spirit of the Church is the same to-day as when Sixtus consecrated the church over the tomb of Alexander.



## CHAPTER IX.

### SIXTUS.

Who dies in youth and vigor dies the best,  
Struck through with wounds, all honest on the breast;  
But when mortals, in fulness of their rage,  
Spurn the hoar head of unresisting age,  
In dust the reverend lineaments deform,  
And pour to dogs the life-blood scarcely warm—  
This, this is misery.

*Iliad*, B. 24.

### I.



T requires but little to pass in thought from the touching scene that passed in the Catacombs of St. Alexander on the 12th of April, 1855 (the nearest we could have in modern times to the dreadful realities of the past), to contemplate the 232d predecessor of Pius IX. addressing his flock in the Catacombs of St. Callistus, when new edicts from the cruel Valerian gave fresh horrors to the virulence of the persecution. The holy Pope Sixtus II., weighed down with years and the

cares of apostolic toil, gathered his priests around him in one of the crypts on the Appian Way, and, reminding them that the leaders in the battle must bear the brunt of the fight, encouraged them to persevere by placing before them the example of the Christian heroes who had already won the crown of life, and how their great Lord and Master went before them on the blood-stained track of martyrdom. "Brothers and fellow-laborers in the vineyard of the Lord," cried out the venerable Pontiff, "do not fear! How many torments have the saints who have gone before us to eternal life suffered! Jesus Christ himself, our great leader and model, suffered that he might give us an example."

Peter in the Mamertine, Sixtus in the Catacombs, and Pius in the Vatican, robbed, imprisoned, and martyred in the miseries of his people, are apt illustrations of the spirit of humiliation and suffering which God destined as the characteristic of his Church. Behold the fifth mark of the Church. It is not in the clash of arms or the bloodshed of battle that her divinity must be proved. Is there any lesson more manifestly inculcated in the history of the past than the miracle of divine

Providence represented by Jesus sleeping during the storm on the bark of Galilee? When the wind was fiercest and the frail vessel is all but sunk, he rises from his apparent sleep and commands the troubled elements to be still. Thus when persecution had driven the Church to the caves of the earth, when her noble pontiffs were dragged before the tribunals of paganism, when every human hope seemed blasted, Jesus was looking on with a smile from his high throne in heaven. At the moment the enemy seemed to triumph, and his sinking servants send forth in their diffidence the anguishing cry for help, the sleeping Providence awakens, calmly chides their unnecessary fears, dispelling the clouds and staying the winds in their fury, and gives the bark of the Church the consolation of a few hours' sunshine.

The warning voice of Sixtus rings from the gloomy caves of the Catacombs, floating over generations of sorrow and woe, reminding us, as well as the children of his martyred flock, that suffering and sorrow is the lot of man in this vale of tears. "Through many tribulations it is necessary to enter the kingdom of heaven."

There is not a land under the sun that has not been wrapt in the gloom of night. From the moment that original innocence was lost under the shadow of the cursed apple-tree of Eden, the brilliant sun of joy was clouded. Labor, blasted hopes, and death, with their innumerable progeny of evil, were scattered from the hand of the Most High to the currents of air that encircle our globe; the sighs of broken friendship, the wails of disconsolate mothers over their departed babes, and the sobs of loving children by the death-bed of their parents, mingle into one dreadful, unbroken groan of woe which forms the dirge of humanity in its lamentation over the loss of its innocence. From the cabin of the poor to the palace of the rich the dismal shadow of sorrow has fallen; misery in his hydra form coils around the king and the peasant; amidst poverty, sickness, and want, for man there is no peace but the tomb. Wealth, honors, riches, are gilded bubbles on the stream of time, and give little consolation; the moment we try to seize them they break into thin air with the sigh of disappointment given by the world's wisest man—“vanity and affliction of spirit.”

Once a holy hermit, who had followed the way of virtue from his childhood, who had never tasted the bitter disappointment of the world's joys, was tempted in his cave in the solitude to ambition, the lot of worldlings; their wealth, their splendid palaces, their luxuries of taste, formed a picture that tempted him to despise the simplicity of his desert home. God sent an angel to dispel his foolish thoughts. The angel brought him to the great cities of the world, to the houses of luxury and wealth, to giddy scenes of revelry and mirth, lifting at the same time the veil that the hypocrisy of man casts around his sorrows. He passed through the different stages of life, but no pen could describe the dark scenes of human sorrow that lurked under the human smile. He saw a monarch on his throne, but the crown of diamonds and gold encircled an aching brow. He saw the wealthy man in his cabinet in the midst of gorgeous furniture; his ancestral towers looked down on golden fields of harvest; satellites fawned on him, and his table groaned under the richest viands; but his troubled heart was heaving like the restless ocean; he writhed under the

agony of blasted ambition ; he was torn with the remorse of ill-gotten power ; was the victim of the melancholy and disappointment that live under the baneful shadows of pride and avarice.

The angel showed the hermit carriages in which rolled the Cleopatras and Messalinas of society, decked in their external charms—gold, silk, and all that the goddess of fashion could lend to the pomp of vanity ; but lifting the gauze that scarcely covered the heaving bosom, he revealed the dark picture of the heart within. One was enveloped in the coils of the snake of jealousy, constantly plunging his poisoned fangs into it ; another pined away in secret hate ; here the *ennui* of dissipation, there the blighted flower of chastity, held a drooping head in the agony of its shame.

“ In these, ere triflers half their wish obtain,  
The toiling pleasure sickens into pain ;  
And e'en while fashion’s brightest arts decoy,  
The heart, distrusting, asks if this be joy.  
Ah ! true it is, survey we life around,  
Whole hosts of ills on every side are found,  
Who wound not here and there by chance a foe,  
But at the species meditate the blow.  
What millions perish by each other’s hands  
In war’s fierce rage, or by the dread commands

Of tyrants' languish out their lives in chains,  
Or lose them in variety of pains !  
What numbers, pinched by want and hunger, die,  
In spite of nature's liberality !  
What numbers, guiltless of their own disease,  
Are snatched by sudden death or waste by slow  
degrees !”

The angel brought him through the humbler walks of life, but everywhere the heavy hand of sorrow had touched the human race ; the anxious parent, the widowed wife, the ruined merchant, the consumptive child, the exiled statesman, all smiling in the ghastly hypocrisy of pretended joy. But enough ! The celestial guide brought the poor hermit to his little cell by the stream in the desert, where there were no racking cares or blighted hopes, and bade him know that they only were happy who had despised the world and thought of eternity.

Yet in all the sorrows of the world, in all the miseries of man, there is one ray of joy that pierces this cloud and never abandons him in the darkest hour of his trial. 'Tis hope. Well the ancients knew it when they invented the fable of Pandora. For us Christians that hope is the consolation of faith in the example of Jesus. This is the

column of light that must guide us in the dark night and through the pathless desert; it will only abandon us on the shores of the promised land beyond the grave. "Jesus suffered that he might give us example," says holy Sixtus. This is the motto on the Christian's banner. In trouble, in sorrow, the more like our great Captain, the more pleasing to him. In the records of hagiology, in the Acts of the martyrs, we have naught but the dark tale of poverty, of persecution, and trial; yet how pleasing and how powerful with God those victims of the world's sorrow! The example of Jesus was a powerful talisman, that made every affliction light, that turned every thorn into a rose; it was the consolation that fell on the souls of the just like the tinted rays of sunlight through the Gothic window into the darkened aisle of the cathedral.

There are moments when trouble bears down on us as the whirlwind, when all human hopes are blasted and all human sympathies incapable of consoling us—moments of awful isolation, when we are unable to bear the evil that overwhelms us. 'Tis then we find consolation in meditation on

the sufferings of Christ. The example of Jesus will be the star of hope that ever shines through the storm. The mother by the couch of her agonizing first-born; the poor, sick woman burdened with children and misfortunes, viewing the bark of her husband tossed in the storm; the victim of oppression turned from his little cottage to die on the roadside; the friend who listens at a distance to the cannon that thunders against his friend; the just man thrown into the same dungeon with the vilest of wretches—for all there is an example and a joy in the passion of Jesus!

This was the secret of martyrdom. This enabled tender youth and delicate virgins to brave the tyrants. Behold! “The victory that overcometh the world—our faith!”

“If misfortune come, she brings along  
The bravest virtues ; and so many great,  
Illustrious spirits have conversed with woe,  
Have in her school been taught, as are enough  
To consecrate distress and make ambition  
E'en with the frown beyond the smile of fortune.”

—THOMSON.

The address of the aged Pontiff had a thrilling effect on his flock. Where could

such an appeal be made with more telling force than to those Roman Christians? Their fathers were martyrs. There was not a family but had a brother or sister crowned; there were even in the congregation many hands stained with the fresh blood-marks of the mangled victims, whose sacred remains they had brought to the Catacombs for honorable interment. The persecution was raging around, and each one was hoping to be the next champion selected for the crown of martyrdom.

The aged Pope made some allusions to his own martyrdom, which he knew by inspiration was at hand. Although it was a farewell that had all the surroundings of the last terrible farewell of the death-bed, yet it was to those holy souls the temporary leave-taking of a fond father who is emigrating to another country, leaving directions to his sons to follow him without delay. Near the Holy Father there were two young deacons, in the bloom of their youth and beauty, with tears rolling down their cheeks like the first dewdrops of a morning flower; they heard their father and beloved Pontiff announcing the darkness of the cloud that was coming

along with the storm not yet spent in its fury. When Sixtus had ceased to speak, one of the deacons, named Felicissimus, unable longer to control the inward sorrow crushing his heart, mingled with a natural anxiety for the future, spoke for himself and companion, named Agapetus: "And we—where shall we go without our father."\*

"Fatherless you shall not be," we can fancy we hear the aged Sixtus reply. "He who has accepted the vows of your generous hearts has wished you to follow your priest in his sacrifice as well as in his crown."

The messengers of death are already on the track of the aged Pontiff. Like the city on the mountain, like the brilliant light that illuminates the darkness, the saintly Pope was easily discovered, and we next find him in chains as a malefactor before the persecutor of the Church, fulfilling the prophecy of Jesus: "They will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and into prisons, dragging you before kings and governors for my

\* "Et nos—quo ibimus sine patre nostro."—*Acts Sti. Christi. Bollandists.*

name's sake, and it shall happen to you for a testimony." \*

The usual question is asked: "Will you pity your old age and sacrifice to our gods?"

A stern refusal evokes the following sentence: "Let this man be taken to the Temple of Mars, that he may sacrifice to that god; if he refuse, cast him into the lower dungeon of the Mamertine." †

He is led in chains through the Forum, followed by his faithful deacons, Agapetus and Felicissimus, in whom the holy Pontiff evinces more anxiety than in his own fate. A crowd of idlers and sight-seers gathered round the brave band of martyrs; some would scoff and repeat the usual blasphemies against the God of the Christians, whilst others, struck with the venerable appearance and halo of sanctity that shone around the aged Sixtus, gave loud expression to their sympathy. The Christians followed in silence and fear, whilst their hearts heaved in sorrow, and then calmed in joy that glory was given to God.

\* St. Luke xxi. 12, 13.

† "Ducite eum ad templum Martis, ut sacrificet Deo Marti; quod si noluerit, recludite eum in privata Mamertini." —*Acta Bollandists.*

Arrived at the Temple of Mars, the Holy Father addressed the crowd of pagans that had gathered round. The Acts give his short, eloquent appeal to those hapless victims of foolish, idolatrous worship.

“O unhappy men!” cried out the Pontiff, with burning zeal for their salvation—“O unhappy men! that you do not weep rather than adore vain idols, deaf and dumb, made by your own hands, which cannot help themselves or any one else. Listen to me, children, and free yourselves from eternal punishment; do not fear the torments they will inflict on you, but rather fear those crimes you are guilty of, and do penance for the folly of sacrificing to idols.”

The words of the holy martyr fell with thrilling effect on his pagan audience. He who blesses the labors of man for his greater glory, and giveth increase to the sapling that *Apollo watereth*,\* sent with the words of the martyrs the invisible unction of grace to melt, to break, the iron casement with which passion guards its throne in the human heart. Short, simple the words of the Pontiff; yet that evening, when the sun had set, those who

\* 1 Cor. iii. 6.

greeted its rise with blasphemies against the true God were stealing along the Appian Way to be introduced to some Christian priest who would instruct and baptize them.

The minions of the pagan judge who brought the martyrs to the Temple of Mars, as might be expected, had their walk for nothing. They returned to the city to fulfil the next part of the sentence—to cast them into *Mamertine's Bath*.

Whilst they are returning from the Appian Way we must bring the reader before them to the city.

Amongst the palaces on the Celian there is the house of a wealthy man who has become a Christian. As charity entered with faith, he immediately turned his house into an hospital. The poor, the aged, and the sick were brought here, but secretly, for fear of the persecutors. The holy priest Justin, who had converted the proprietor of the house, remained with those poor creatures, instructing and ministering the consolations of religion. Lawrence the deacon, whose sanctity was famous amongst the Christians, was bringing the Viaticum to a poor woman in the district, heard of Justin

and his converts, and hastened to congratulate them on their conversion. Having arrived at the house, a strange scene occurred.

Who has not heard of the dispute between Paul and Anthony in the desert, who would divide the small loaf of bread sent them by God for their meal? Each in his humility gave precedence to the other. More touching still was a scene of humility recorded in the Acts of this saint. St. Lawrence, entering the room, threw himself on the ground to kiss the feet of St. Justin; and St. Justin, with a similar impulse of humility, wished to kiss the feet of St. Lawrence. For some time the two saints struggled with each other to see who would have the privilege of kissing the feet of the other; at length Justin, being reminded that he was a priest and held the higher grade, yielded to the triumph of the deacon.

Lawrence, hearing that his beloved Pontiff was seized, flew across the city, and reaching the Forum, beheld the venerable Sixtus in the midst of the soldiers and proceeding towards the Mamertine. Regardless of the crowd, he threw himself

before the Holy Father, and from the abundance of his heart poured forth his eloquent appeal to be allowed to join him in the glory of his martyrdom. St. Ambrose has preserved for us a touching description of the eloquence of the Levite addressing Sixtus:

“Father, where art thou going without thy son? Holy priest, whither dost thou proceed without thy deacon? It was not your custom to offer sacrifice without the assistance of a minister. What, then, in me hath displeased thee, father? Hast thou found me unfaithful? Put to the test whether he whom you selected to be your minister was worthy of that choice; or, after confiding in him the distribution of the blood of the Lord and a share in the consummation of the sacraments, do you now refuse to let him share in the offering you are going to make of your own blood? Did not Abraham offer his own son, did not Peter send Stephen before him? And wilt thou not show thy affection for thy son, and offer to heaven whom thou hast educated for martyrdom?”

Then Sixtus, delighted with the fervor

of the Levite, and with looks beaming with sympathy and affection, foretold to St. Lawrence the crown prepared for him in heaven:

"Son, it is not that I forsake thee or refuse the ministry of my disciple, but that you may remain for still more glorious trials. To me, infirm and old, a smoother course is assigned; but to thy youthful vigor a conquest and triumph more glorious. Cease to weep; in three days you will follow me." Then he bade him distribute to the poor the little they had reserved for the wants and exigencies of the Church.

Amidst the tears and lamentations of the people he was led into the Mamertine, to be cast into the lower dungeon of that terrible prison. They spent the time in prayer. A holy joy filled their hearts, and they whiled away the lonely hours in cheerful conversation. The beauty of the angels, the joys of heaven, and the glories of God were inexhaustive themes of enquiry on the eve of their introduction to those scenes of bliss and sounds of joy that never fell on mortal eye or ear. They spoke of the ineffable

delights of the beatific vision, an ocean of mystery that no clouded heart could conceive. These thoughts nerved them for the momentary torments of martyrdom. On the third day they were summoned again before the judge.

The casual reader may wonder how the Acts are able to give the exact words used when the martyrs stood before the judges, especially as many of the Acts were written years after the events they relate. This fact—the very words of the conversation quoted in the Acts—is the greatest proof of their authenticity. Conversations are the work of imagination in fiction, but in the Acts of the Martyrs they are reports of judicial proceedings. The officials of the court were bound to keep minutes of what passed before the tribunal, and from these reports the Christians, either through bribery or favor, copied the report of many an interesting and thrilling scene in connection with the martyrs. Some of these reports of the pagan courts are still extant, and form in their brief simplicity some of the richest pages in the codex of the *Acta Sanctorum*. Thus,

we generally give a literal translation of the questions and answers that passed between the martyrs and their judges. The interview between the aged Pontiff Sixtus and the impious Valerian was brief.

"We pity thy age," said Valerian. "Now hear our commands, and sacrifice."

Sixtus answered: "Miserable man! think of thyself; cease to blaspheme, but do penance for the blood of the saints thou hast shed."

One of the deacons with the Holy Father cried out at this moment: "If you would hearken to the advice given you by our venerable father, you would escape the eternal torments which are prepared for you."

Then Valerian, enraged, said: "These men threaten even us with eternal torments! Why do we permit them to live any longer? Take them, lictors, to the Temple of Mars, and, if they refuse to sacrifice, let them be killed on the spot."

A great crowd followed once more to the Temple of Mars; amongst them, in tears, was the Deacon Lawrence. Not that he wept because his beloved Pontiff and fellow-deacons were being led to death, but

because he was not condemned along with them. His Acts tell us it was on this occasion he was seized for crying out to the holy Pontiff that he had no longer any treasures to distribute, and had therefore no reason to live any longer. The soldiers, hearing something about treasures, seized him, and, after the martyrdom of Sixtus, he was brought back with them to the city, and cast into the Mamertine.

Arrived at the Temple of Mars, the holy Pontiff was asked would he sacrifice; smiling with pity on the silly soldiers—who, perhaps, like the executioners of Jesus, knew not what they were doing—turning toward the immense pile that was raised in costly magnificence to the worship of demons, he cried out: “May Christ, the Son of God, destroy thee!” Amen was murmured by the Christians around. Immediately part of the splendid temple came tottering down with a crash like thunder. It was the will of God that the holy Pope should receive his crown of martyrdom; and some of the soldiers who were not converted, believing the miracles of the Christians to be works of magic,

led Sixtus and his two deacons to a small hill alongside the temple, called *Clivum Martis*. The aged Pontiff bent his head to the sword, that it might be separated from the flesh here and be crowned in heaven. The two noble youths followed him with unflinching bravery. The Christians around wept with sorrow, but the angels wept with joy.

Their bodies were cast on the adjoining plain to be devoured by birds and dogs, but the Christians stole them in the night; the body of St. Sixtus they brought to the Catacombs of St. Callistus, and probably buried it under the very spot he suffered; the other two, for some reason not mentioned, were buried in the Catacombs of Prætextatus, which were probably a branch of those of St. Callistus.

The following passage, relative to the discovery of the tomb of this holy Pontiff in 1850, will be read with great interest:

“This part of the Catacombs, discovered by De Rossi, for ten centuries lost and forgotten, occupied the angular portion between the Via Appia and Ardeatina. It consists of several distinct areas, supposed to

have been unconnected originally, from the fact that the galleries that in some parts connect them are not in the same level; staircases have had to be erected at the place of junction. The most ancient area is that of St. Lucina, which was begun in apostolic times, probably by Pomponia Græcina, the wife of Plautius, who conquered Britain. That portion, however, to which most importance is attached was added, most likely, in the time of Marcus Aurelius. It is here that the celebrated papal crypt is situated. Some time before we come to it the *graffiti*\* warn us we are coming to a place of unusual sanctity. These have often been the means of great discoveries; for they show that many visitors have come to the place where they are, and hence are a mark of its celebrity. Very often, too, they make mention of names that clear away a crowd of difficulties.

\* These were names, verses, and scribblings on the walls by generations that lived some thousand years ago, and visited, as we do now, through curiosity or devotion those mementoes of the past. It is generally supposed that this mode of immortalizing names obscure and unknown beyond a limited family circle is a peculiar national failing of the Anglo-Saxons; but these discoveries in the newly opened Catacombs tell us that the Romans of the Middle Ages also found a pleasure in this weakness.

Thus in the present instance there is frequent reference to St. Sixtus—the great saint of the Catacomb. The delight of the discoverer on entering for the first time into the papal crypt must have been very great indeed. The place, the tombstone of St. Cornelius, the writings on the walls, and especially the frequent occurrence of the name of St. Sixtus amongst them, had combined to increase his conviction that he had at last found out this chamber; but now that he entered, a sight met his eyes that at once excluded all doubt. Lying on the ground in various places were the fragments which, when collected, proved to be the monumental stones of SS. Antheros, Fabian, Lucius, and Eutychianus, to three of which the designation “*Eþ*” was added. Nowhere amidst the subterranean caverns had an inscription as yet been found with this affix; and though the term episcopus did not seem to have been used in its restricted sense till some time after the foundation of Christianity, yet it had become fixed by the middle of the third century. It could not, therefore, but be remarkable that in this very place, where so many signs were pointing as

the probable burial-place of the bishops of Rome, three out of four of the tablets before him should have borne it. Moreover, ancient MSS. gave the names of SS. Antheros, Fabian, Lucius, and Eutychianus as having sat in the chair of Peter during the third century, and having been buried in the cemetery of St. Callistus. At a little distance was found another slab, which belonged to the mensa or table of an altar-tomb. On it was engraven in Greek characters “Urbanus Ep.” St. Urban was the name of the successor of St. Callistus in the pontificate; but he is reported to have been buried, not in this cemetery, but in that of St. Prætextatus. De Rossi, however, had all along been led to suspect with many other learned men that there were two bishops of this name, who in the ancient documents were occasionally confounded with one another—the first a martyr, buried in the cemetery of St. Prætextatus; the second a pope and confessor, buried at St. Callistus. The slab now before him made this opinion more likely, and thus removed the difficulty that hung over the Acts of St. Cecilia. But Sixtus was the great martyr of these Catacombs, and De Rossi sought

anxiously for something which should testify to his having been buried here. This martyr, who is mentioned by St. Cyprian, lived during the time of the Emperors Valerian and Gallienus. These sovereigns issued a decree forbidding the assemblies of the Christians wont to be held in the cemeteries; but St. Sixtus, in defiance of the order, retired to the Catacomb of St. Prætextatus (supposed to be a portion of that of St. Callistus), which was supposed to be less known, and was there saying Mass when the soldiers surprised him, bore him to the judgment-hall, thence to the Mamertine, and then to the Temple of Mars, near which, at the *Clivum Martis*, they put him to death—almost over the very spot where they seized him. Four deacons were executed with him; two of whom were buried on the spot; but the others with Sixtus were taken to the papal crypt, that the venerable Pontiff might repose amongst his brethren. Many years afterwards Pope Damasus marked the spot with an inscription, the words of which have been handed down to us. De Rossi found a portion of this inscription in the cham-

ber of the Pontiffs. The exact loculus of the sacred relics has not yet, however, been discovered.





## CHAPTER X.

LAWRENCE.

(August 10, 258.)

“ You were used  
To say extremities were the triers of spirits;  
That common chances common men could bear;  
That when the sea was calm, all boats alike  
Showed mastership in floating.”

—SHAKSPERE, *Coriolanus*.

### I.

**H**OW inscrutable the ways of God ! He maketh use of the little things of this world to confound the strong. Often has the piety and simple eloquence of an humble maid brought the light of faith to the homes of the wealthy. Adverse winds that drive the struggling bark from its course have been frequently destined in the mysterious ways of divine Providence to bring the cross and the consolations of religion to a people shrouded with the darkness of superstition and error. The trials and sorrows of life are the chan-

nels of divine blessings; and the impiety and injustice of man, that have at times cast the innocent servants of God into gloomy dungeons amid slaves and sinners, have but fulfilled an eternal decree which destined them to delight heaven with the tears of repentance. The Acts before us open with a beautiful and touching scene where we behold this trait of divine Providence in all its consoling triumph.

In a long, narrow street of the Eternal City, on the slopes of the Viminal, and known by the Italians as the "Urban Way amongst the mountains," there is a small church dedicated to St. Lawrence. Around this little church there are hallowed reminiscences known to few. Underneath is the horrible, dark prison, formerly part of the house of Hippolytus, where the young deacon Lawrence was imprisoned. As the lofty waterfalls of Europe are called the little daughters of Niagara, we may safely, by the same stretch of imagination, call this terrible prison the eldest daughter of the Mamertine. It is at the foot of a tower to which a narrow, winding stairs conducted, and the brickwork shows characteristics of the time of Adrian.

The prison is small, but joined by a dark corridor, which served, most probably, as a wine-cellar. On the narrow stairs used in ancient times there are closed apertures in the walls, supposed to lead into interminable catacombs. Local tradition states a division of students incautiously penetrated those catacombs and never returned. We tremble at the awful death of these young men; their anxious wanderings in those gloomy labyrinths of the dead, their agonies of hunger and useless shrieks for help. Buried alive in the womb of the earth, they saved their survivors the painful task of interment. The pious pilgrim may here drink from the miraculous well that sprang up at the prayer of Lawrence to baptize the fortunate slaves that shared the prison and the fate of the Levite. In this narrow, dark recess we repair in spirit and contemplate Lawrence amongst the slaves.

It is probable our saint was but one night in the Mamertine. The prefect longed to gratify his avarice with the confiscated treasures of the Church, and early on the morning after his arrest at the Temple of Mars Lawrence was brought before Valerian. At the first interview he was treated with

all the cunning of hypocrisy, which cloaked for awhile the cruel and bloody designs of the prefect. He was handed over to Hippolytus, who was to be sharer in the spoils if he succeeded in wresting them from his prisoner, whom we thus find cast into the cellar of Hippolytus with the refractory slaves of his household. Each wealthy Roman had his own prison for the punishment of his slaves. For minor transgressions they were put into *durance vile*; but for graver offences they were invariably cast into the Tiber from the island in the heart of the city, or buried alive in the horrible pits on the Esquiline.

Lawrence is an angel of consolation amongst his fellow-sufferers. He soon made their acquaintance; he passed through them with words of encouragement. The lively, happy humor of the young Christian made them forget the privations of their prison. He enquired from each one the cause of his trouble; one is condemned for accidentally breaking an ornament; another had tarried in the Forum or Circus when sent on an errand; another, a poor female slave, had incurred the displeasure of the mistress by

mislaying a jewel or daring to look in the same mirror; all told their sorrows and pleaded innocence, although it were only to gain the sympathy of their fellow-sufferers. Lawrence had a smile and a consolation for each. Amongst the prisoners he noticed an old man whom the weight of years had stooped, and whose hair had acquired the snow of old age; beside him was a young man who did not join in the garrulous lamentations of the other slaves, but every now and then sobbed heavily. His tale was a touching one.

The old man, named Lucillus, was his father. Through feebleness and blindness he was dismissed as a useless burden by one of the patrician tyrants of the city. Cold and hungry, he sat at the palace-gate of Hippolytus. The son had stolen some food for him, and was caught in the fact by the taskmaster, who cast both into the cellar. But more: the young man told Lawrence, with an anguish that tore the fibres of his affectionate heart, that as his father was blind and could be of no use as a slave, now that they had the excuse of theft, they would let him die of

starvation or cast him down the Puticulum of the Esquiline.

Lawrence was moved to tears. That consoling sympathy which moves even the heart of God for the suffering children of man was reflected on the heart of the Levite. Like lightning at night, the divine inspiration flashed over his soul, and bade him cure the blind man and save the companions of his prison. He told the afflicted father and weeping son the power of the name of Jesus. In a few moments he secured the promise of their faith. With outstretched arms he asked the favor from God. An exclamation of joy from the old man announced that the few struggling rays of light that crept through the corridor of the wine-cellar had fallen with refreshing brilliancy on his sightless eyes—Lucillus could see!

How tell the consoling issue of this miracle? The little cellar became a church; it is one still. The slaves were chained in silent attention to the instructions of Lawrence. He told them with many tears the thrilling tale of the birth, life, and crucifixion of our Blessed Lord; the consolations the faith of Christianity could bring to the poor,

trampled victims of wealthy oppression; and the doctrines of immortality and eternal joy. Oh! what consolations had Lawrence for those poor, suffering slaves, outcasts of society, who never heard a kind word, for whom the night of human misery was long and dark, and on whom his words fell like refreshing rain on a parched soil—the first dawn of Christian hope for souls that sat in the darkness of the tomb, the shadow of death. They declared their desire to become Christians; and Lawrence, like Peter in the Mamertine, bade the rock give him water, and a fountain flowed at his feet, pure as the crystal waters of the mountain spring. Before sunset on that auspicious day the fortunate slaves, twenty-one in number, in the cellars of Hippolytus were able to sing with the holy Levite, in the words of the royal prophet: “Who is like to the Lord our God, who lives on high, and looks on the lowly things in heaven and on earth; raising up the needy from the earth, and lifting up the poor from the dung-hill; that he may place them with princes, with the princes of the people.” \*

\* Psalm cxii.

At sunset the servants came to give the scanty food to the imprisoned slaves. When they opened the prison-door, sounds of joy greeted them like the sweet odors of flowers that rush through the door of a conservatory. The miracles of Lawrence, the poor man's sight, the miraculous well, the joy that could not conceal itself, were told by many voices at the same time. Some stayed to question Lucillus, others gazed in wonder at the fountain, whilst others ran to acquaint their master of the strange doings in the prison.

Hippolytus was one of these simple, upright souls. Gifted with natural virtue, his thoughts were religious, though, through ignorance, directed to the worship of false gods. His heart could feel sympathy for the sorrows of his fellow-creatures. His religious prejudice—the fruit of early training—but needed one ray of light to be lifted from his thoughts like the mist that hangs over the lake until banished by the sun. He came to the prison, accompanied by his family. Conviction entered his soul, and grace completed a triumph; casting himself at the feet of Lawrence, he begged to be made a Christian.

The pilgrim to the Eternal City may to this day drink from the miraculous fountain from which Hippolytus and his family were baptized; and amongst the relics which tradition venerates in the Basilica of St. Lawrence is a copper vessel used by the saint on the occasion of this ceremony. Nothing could be more consoling to the earnest student of history than the evidence of early Christianity, read in those memorials of the past. When we pore over the thrilling records of this brave youth's miracles and martyrdom, it must be with feelings of conviction and deeper reverence we visit the self-same wine-cellars and prison beneath the house of Hippolytus where God was pleased to manifest his glory and power in his saints.

Lawrence has become the friend of the blind. The cure of Lucillus rolled on the wings of fame through the city. Others came to the youth whose word, like the mighty fiat of God, ordered light to exist for the darkened world of the blind. Innumerable conversions were effected

amongst the poor, for whom our youthful saint had a special love.

Our readers are doubtless aware Lawrence was the martyr that suffered the awful death of being roasted on a gridiron; a glance at the circumstances that led to this unparalleled act of cruelty gives an insight into the character of this brave champion of the faith, and must console those who, in the misfortunes of life, are ranked amongst the poor of Jesus Christ.

Once more before the tribunal of Valerian he is asked for the treasures of the Church. Lawrence requested three days to collect them; the request was granted, and the prefect exulted in dreamy anticipation of a heap of gold. The youth returned to the house of Hippolytus more as a guest than a prisoner. He spent the three days in gathering to the house of Hippolytus the poor, the sick, the lame, the imbecile; those on whom the hand of misfortune had fallen, whose tattered garments and pale, starving features told the woes of crushing poverty. On the third day he was followed to the tribunal of the prefect by

a sorrow-stricken crowd. Lawrence was cheerful and gay, and seemed to anticipate the disappointment and lesson he was about to give the avaricious judge. Amidst a death-like stillness, in which the spectators of the court awaited the revelations of the Christian, Valerian asked, "Where are the treasures of the Church?"

Lawrence made a sign, and in a moment every vacant space of the hall was occupied by the poor wretches who had accompanied him. The satellites of the judge gazed at each other in silence and astonishment, whilst the fearless deacon, looking with a cheerful smile on the friends of that God who was born in a stable, waving his hand towards them, said in a loud voice: "There, tyrant, are the treasures of the Church."\*

A large crowd had assembled to see the gifts to be presented to the prefect, but the keenness of their disappointment manifested itself in a low, menacing murmur. The discomfiture of the tyrant was apparent, and Lawrence, conscious of a victory, stood un-

\* "Ubi sunt ecclesiæ facultates? At ille extendens manum in pauperes, Hæc sunt, inquit, ecclesiæ facultates!"—*St. Peter Chrys. in Serm. 135.*

dauntedly before him with folded arms, and quietly awaiting the sentence that would be dictated by his impotent rage. He trembled on his seat; the blood rushed to his bloated features, and his hand was clenched. A thousand cruel deaths would not satiate the revenge of that moment. When he could control himself to speak, he stammered forth: "Seize him, lictors, and scourge him!"

Valerian looked on with fiendish delight whilst the tender flesh of Lawrence was torn with scorpion-whips. He would have given half his wealth to wring one sigh, one acknowledgment of pain, from the brave youth. But, silent, his eyes closed and arms folded, Lawrence was wrapt in meditation on the scourging of Jesus in the hall of Pilate. Heated iron plates were prepared by order of Valerian and applied to his sides, which were now raw and bloody by the tearing fangs of the scorpion-lashes. All the instruments of torture which were kept in readiness were brought. Any one of them would destroy poor frail humanity, yet could not shake the firmness of a martyr; nor could they in their aggregate horrors satiate the

rage of the incensed judge. After some time Valerian had Lawrence brought before the statue of Jupiter, in whose temple they were assembled, in the foolish hope he would now yield and sacrifice. Arrived before the statue, he said, "Sacrifice to the gods, and cease to put your trust in the treasures you have concealed."

Lawrence replied, "I both trust in them and I am sure of them."

Well he knew they were preserved for him in the archives of heaven, where no thieves can enter, where no moth or rust can consume.

We need not detail the harrowing series of torture—scorpions, burning plates, the indescribable agonies of the rack, and all the horrible ingenuities of human cruelty tried in turn. So severe were these torments that Lawrence prayed that God would let him die. But a voice replied from heaven that even greater torments were yet to be borne; at the same time a flood of spiritual consolation was poured upon his soul, and in an ecstasy of joy he asked God to let the people see how he consoled his servants.\*

\* Et cum dentissime cum plumbatis cæderetur, dixit, Domine

Suddenly one of the soldiers pauses in his work of torture; with exclamations of surprise and delight his eyes are fixed on a beautiful vision. 'Tis the guardian angel of Lawrence applying odoriferous lint to the bleeding wounds.\* He immediately loosens the handles of the rack, and, lifting the saint from his torture, throws himself at his feet, and begs to be made a Christian. To the surprise of the judge he rushed out of the room, and returned in a moment bearing a copper vessel filled with water. St. Lawrence blessed the water and baptized him.

Like hounds that have suddenly broken from the scent of the wearied stag, and rush with a louder hue-and-cry on a fresh one that has started from his lair, the enraged judge turned with all his fury on the brave Romanus. The rough soldier, in one glance at an angel, caught the in-

Jesu Christe, . . . accipe spiritum meum. Et audita est vox. Adhuc multa certamina tibi debentur. . . . Qu subridens et gratias agens dicebat: Benedictus es Domine noster Jesu Christe, qui nobis donasti misericordiam quam meriti non sumus. Sed tu Domine propter pietatem tuam da nobis gratiam, ut cognoscant omnes circumstantes quia tu consolaris servos tuos.—*Acts of St. Lawrence.*

\* Video ante te hominem pulcherrimum stantem cum linteo et extergentem membra tua.—*Ib.*

spiration of the sublime mysteries of Christianity. Faith and courage so filled his soul that he desired now to suffer the very torments he had so cruelly inflicted on the tender frame of Lawrence. Unable to restrain the first impulse of faith that had fallen like lightning on his heart, he rushed towards the judge and cried out, "I am a Christian!"

The judge ordered his companions to scourge him. In the meantime Lawrence was removed to another room in the palace, still under the care of Hippolytus, and many other Christians came to console him; he was allowed a respite of a few hours whilst the impious Valerian was venting his fury on Romanus.

The brave soldier bore his scourging without moving a muscle or giving one expression of pain. He had learned the power of divine grace in the invincible Levite, and felt the consolation of being able to repeat, like him, the holy name of "Jesus." At length the tyrant ordered the soldier to be brought outside the city and be executed. On his way to the Porta Salara he recounted to his companions what he saw, and, by a divine and newly-acquired eloquence, sought to in-

duce them to abandon the foolish worship of idols, to become Christians. Romanus was one of those few and heaven-inspired martyrs who were only asked to exercise their faith in Jesus for a few hours in the storms of time, that they might bask for ever in the unclouded sunshine of eternal truth. No further particulars are given us of this saint. He is celebrated in the martyrologies on the 9th of August—not on the same day as St. Lawrence; for the latter did not pass to his crown until after the midnight following. The copper vessel from which he was baptized is said to be still preserved in the Basilica of St. Lawrence, where also are venerated his relics.\*

It was the 9th of August, 258. The sun had set on this day, ever memorable in the annals of the Church, and night was gathering over the city. The impious Valerian returned to the Baths of Sallust, after a heavy repast and half stupefied with wine, to recommence his feast of cruelty on the martyrs of Jesus Christ. The holy deacon was once more brought before him, whilst the implements of torture that were again to rack and

\* Acts of St. Lawrence, Aug. 10.

tear his tender flesh jingled together as they were carried on the shoulders of the executioner.\* When Lawrence was summoned from the room in which he had been confined with Hippolytus, a touching scene occurred. The feelings of Hippolytus toward Lawrence had rung, like the different chimes of bells, all the changes of contempt, veneration, and gratitude, and the two latter had now united to fill his heart with love. In desire to be united with the holy youth, and in zeal to proclaim his faith in Jesus Christ, for a moment he struggled with Lawrence to be allowed to go before him to the tribunal of Valerian and declare himself a Christian. With tears in his eyes he said to Lawrence, "Why can't I too shout out that I am a Christian?"† But the gentle reproof of Lawrence made him forbear; for the hour of his trial had not yet come. Resigned, and wrapt in his toga, he stood one side, and with silent tears, quickly brushed away, he watched the closing scene of this thrilling tragedy.

"Cast aside this perfidy of magic," said

\* "Et allata sunt cum eo omnia genera tormentorum."—*Ib.*

† "Quare ego non vociferor Christianus sum."—*Ib.*

Valerian with a stutter, and scarcely knowing what he said, "and tell us your history."

Lawrence, with scarcely a portion of his body sound, looked, as it were with pity, on the tyrant, and answered mildly: "I am a Spaniard by birth, educated at Rome, and from my childhood a Christian, instructed in every holy and divine law."

"Sacrifice, then, to the gods," roared Valerian, interrupting him; "if thou dost not, the whole of this night will be spent in tormenting you."<sup>\*</sup>

"Ah!" replied Lawrence, "my night has no darkness; everything shines in brightness."

Although these words (*omnia in luce clarescant*) have the mystic meaning of faith, we could fancy he was permitted by God to see the brilliant glare that illumined the night from the flames quickened by the melting flesh of his own burning body.

He ordered him to be beaten on his mouth with stones; but Lawrence smiled. Then his bed was brought in.<sup>†</sup>

The bed of St. Lawrence! It was iron;

\* "Nox ista expendetur in te cum suppliciis."

† "Allatus est lectus cum tribus costis."—*Ib.*

it had cross-bars, too, about a foot from the ground. The soft down on which he was to rest his wounded body were the lambent flames that leaped up from the blazing fagots! A bed is associated with thoughts of repose; the wearied mind and body seek the sweet refreshment of sleep. Oh! how the bed of Lawrence must make us shudder to think of the awful bed of the damned soul. For the martyr, the fire of divine love consumed his spirit with more vigor than the flames that kissed and fed on his chaste flesh; but a bed of fire without the consolation of hope, without end, not permitted, but kindled, by God—O Christian! think and tremble.

Lawrence was cast on his bed. The expressions of the holy martyr during his final torments are very touching—at one moment fearlessly reproving the tyrant, and then turning to God in all gratitude of a cheerful spirit.

“Learn, impious tyrant, the power of my God. Your burning coals are for me refreshing; for you they will burn in eternity. Thou, O Lord! knowest that when accused I have not denied; when questioned, I have

answered; and when tortured, I have given thanks!" Then, with a beautiful countenance, he said, "I thank thee, Lord Jesus Christ, because thou hast deigned to comfort me."

Again, looking up towards Valerian, as the flames were being fed by the dripping flesh: "Behold, one side is roasted; turn me, and then eat!"\* In a faint, sinking voice he said: "I thank thee, O Lord Jesus! that I have deserved to pass through thy gates," and breathed forth his pure soul into the hands of God, whose angels were waiting by this awful scene of triumph to congratulate and hasten with the soul of the Christian hero to their own bright, happy home, where no tyrant's frown and no pain can be felt.

With horrible cruelty they left his body on the iron grating to be still burnt as long as there was heat in the smouldering faggots. Valerian and his prefect repaired to their beds of luxury and down; but far preferable was the bed of Lawrence, refreshed like a couch of roses, and cooled by the

\* "Ecce miser assasti unam partem; regyra aliam et manduca."

balmy dew of spiritual consolation, from which he rose with the sun to a glorious eternity, to the thorny and demon-haunted couch of the insensate tyrants guilty of such horrible murder. But the hour of vengeance is not far off; 'tis coming up like a whirlwind on the deep.

## II.

After gathering the charred bones of Lawrence, and hiding them in the garden of Cyriaca, Hippolytus returned to his house, sad and foreboding. He could not banish the memory of the wondrous scene he had witnessed. But he knew his own hour was not far off; he arranged all his temporal matters, set his slaves free, and distributed his goods to the poor. Whilst calmly and patiently preparing for his trial, about three days after the martyrdom of Lawrence, about the second hour after mid-day, it was announced to him that the house was surrounded with soldiers. They seized him and brought him before Decius.

"So you also have become a magician,"

said Decius, "and stolen the body of Lawrence."

Hippolytus replied, "Yes, I have; not as a magician, but as a Christian."

The judge ordered him to be struck across the mouth for having uttered such words, to be beaten, and then to have his Christian garments taken off.\*

He was also scourged. Whilst the heavy blows were falling on him, he found his consolation in crying out, "I am a Christian."

The judge then tried to seduce him by blandishments, and ordered him to be clothed in rich military garments, according to his rank. Decius then said to him, "Be mindful of your military rank, and be our friend as formerly, and enjoy the rewards of your service."

"Now my profession is to declare myself a faithful Christian soldier," replied Hippolytus.

But some terrible scenes were to pass before he would suffer the awful death prepared for him. They came to his house, in order to seize on everything he had, and he was brought thither in chains with the soldiers

\* "Expoliataque veste qua ceu Christianus utebatur."

and prefect, Valerian. The members of his household were summoned before the judge; but he found them, like their master, Christians. Amongst them there was an old domestic named Concordia; she had been Hippolytus' nurse, and was now a pensioner in the family, loved and respected by all, especially by the grateful and noble soldier, her foster-child, now in chains for the faith. At the sight of Hippolytus in the hands of the soldiers, as she knew, in transit to his doom, she burst into tears.

The agents of the prefect, seeing the household of Hippolytus much affected, were encouraged rather than moved to sympathy. He cried out to them: "Be mindful of yourselves, or you will suffer with your master." But Concordia, weeping, cried out aloud: "We will die with our master; it is better to die Christians than live in your contamination."

Valerian, frowning with anger on the old nurse, ordered the soldiers to bring her forward, saying, "A race of slaves can be cured only with the lash!" She was cruelly beaten with the rods of the lictor's axe; they had scarcely commenced their

barbarous treatment of the faithful old servant when she gave her soul into the hands of God.\*

Hippolytus raised his eyes to heaven, and, with a sigh that told of an internal struggle, said: "I thank thee, O Lord! that thou hast permitted her to be amongst thy saints."

Valerian then ordered the household of the saint to be brought outside the Porta Tiburtina, and be executed before their master's eyes.

The brave Hippolytus encouraged them to be firm; like the master of a forest, who stands by whilst his servants are cutting down the beautiful and ancient trees that cover the ground, this master stood by while the axe felled the members of his household. He spoke to each slave, now become a Christian, with an affectionate and encouraging sympathy. Amongst the victims of that morning was the poor blind man whose cure brought such blessings on all; his son too, happy in the blissful thought his father would never want in the world he was about to exchange for this.

\* "Ea dum cæderetur emisit spiritum."—*Acta Surius.*

In Grecian fables there was an Hippolytus, the ill-fated and injured son of the warlike Theseus. Unconsciously he became the victim of a lustful passion in his mother-in-law. He rejected with scorn her base suggestions; she accused him, like Potiphar, in her revenge. He was banished and cursed by his father. Leaving Athens for Trœzen, his horses took flight, frightened, it is said, by a sea-monster; he was cast from his chariot, and, entangled in the reins, was dragged over stones and rugged paths. The thrilling scene, described in the sublime tragedy of the French poet, serves us as a key to the Acts of the Christian hero who thus won his crown. The frightened horses rushed with their victim in headlong speed:

“ La frayeur les emporte ; et, sourds à cette fois,  
Ils ne connaissent plus ni le frein ni la voix ;  
En efforts impuissants leur maître se consume ;  
Ils rougissent le mors d’une sanglante écume.  
On dit qu’on a vu même, en ce désordre affreux,  
Un dieu qui d’aiguillons pressait leur flanc poudreux.  
A travers les rochers la peur les précipite ;  
L’essieu crie et se rompt : l’intrépide Hippolyte  
Voit voler en éclats tout son char fracassé ;  
Dans les rênes lui-même il tombe embarrassé.

Excusez ma douleur ; cette image cruelle  
 Sera pour moi de pleurs une source éternelle :  
 J'ai vu, seigneur, j'ai vu votre malheureux fils  
 Traîné par les chevaux que sa main a nourris.  
 Il veut les rappeler, et sa voix les effraie ;  
 Ils courrent : tout son corps n'est bientôt qu'une  
 plaie.

De nos cris douloureux la plaine retentit.  
 Leur fougue impétueuse enfin se ralentit.  
 Ils s'arrêtent non loin de ces tombeaux antiques  
 Où des rois ses aieux sont les froides reliques.  
 J'y cours en soupirant, et sa garde me fuit.  
 De son généreux sang la trace nous conduit ;  
 Les rochers en sont teints ; les ronces dégouttantes  
 Portent de ses cheveux les dépouilles sanglantes.  
 J'arrive, je l'appelle ; et me tendant la main,  
 Il ouvre un œil mourant qu'il renferme soudain :  
 'Le ciel, dit il, m'arrache une innocente vie.  
 Prends soin après ma mort de la triste Aricie.  
 Cher ami, si mon père, un jour désabusé,  
 Plaint le malheur d'un fils faussement accusé,  
 Pour appaiser mon sang et mon ombre plaintive,  
 Dis-lui qu'avec douceur il traite sa captive ;  
 Qu'il lui rende—' A ce mot ce héros expiré  
 N'a laissé dans mes bras qu'un corps défiguré :  
 Triste objet où des dieux triomphe la colère,  
 Et que méconnaîtrait l'œil même de son père." \*

Behold the awful death destined for the  
 brave soldier who, in the third century, was  
 to give in the name of Christianity an his-  
 toric reality to this tragic fable of Grecian  
 mythology.

\* "Œuvres de Racine," tome ii. p. 405.

Whilst the executioners of his household were gazing on the mangled victims that now lay still and terrible in a pool of blood, the sound of horses' feet are heard. A centurion of the cavalry came galloping to the residence of Hippolytus with two of the most spirited animals in the corps. The brave Christian had learned how to die. The poor, illiterate, and neophyte domestics of his house had bravely fallen before his eyes. In the days of his military glory, and under the spur of vain ambition, he dared death in the battle-throng; could he now flinch when God and eternity demanded the sacrifice? With a smile of joy he gave his hands to the ropes that were to bind him. The fatal knots tied, the excited steeds were set free. They plunged and reared like war-horses impatient for the charge of battle. They seemed to know a great work was before them—the will of God in the death of Hippolytus. They dash forward at full speed. Angels hovered over the bloody track to receive the martyr's spirit; and before the panting chargers slackened their speed the soul of Hippolytus was greeted at the por-

tals of heaven by Sixtus, Lawrence, Concordia, and the martyred members of his household, in the crimson-stoled galaxy of happy spirits who follow the Lamb wheresoever he goeth.

### III.

BUT the last act in this thrilling tragedy is yet to come. It brings us once more to the mighty womb of the Coliseum, resounding with the thunder of thousands of united voices, and reeking with the blood that flows through this huge wine-press of martyrdom. The prefects Valerian and Decius had ordered a *fête* in the amphitheatre, and as part of the performance the Christians were to be dragged from their prisons and exhibited to the mockeries of the mob.\*

On the appointed day the rulers were driven to the Coliseum in a golden chariot; its 100,000 benches were filled up to the large veil that covered the stupendous opening towards the heavens, and the theatre rang with the usual shouts of

\* "Multorumque martyrum funestas cædes exhiberent."—*Acta Hippolyti Surius*.

the impatient crowd. When the prefects took their seats, and the acclamations of the people—who, perhaps, but applauded for the sake of the noise they made—had subsided, the shrill blast of the editor's trumpet announced that the games had commenced. But heaven had decreed that the Christians should not be mocked on this occasion, and the blasphemies intended for God and the amusement intended for the people should be interrupted by an awful scene of judgment on his enemies. Valerian gave the murderer of Lawrence the order, “Bring in the Christians.” That moment he was seized by a devil. He gave an unearthly yell of pain that rang through the amphitheatre. All eyes are turned towards the royal dais he occupies. Distinctly they hear him cry out: “O Hippolytus! you bind me with horrible chains.” In the same moment Decius falls to the ground; he too is possessed by the devil. Writhing in an agony of pain, he cried out in a voice of terror: “O Lawrence! you drag me with burning chains!”

Another fearful shriek from Valerian; he

is lifted in the air and flung to the ground, a hideous corpse. Decius, putting his hands to his head, ran through the people screaming; he made his way through the crowd, and pushed towards his own palace. The sudden death of Valerian put an end to the games, and the sudden retreat of Decius was attributed to grief and fear. The Christians were brought back to their prisons, and the people dispersed with feelings of awe that made them remember that eventful morning.

For three days Decius lay on his couch, howling in the agonies of possession. The flames that burned the body of Lawrence seemed to be carried in the hands of demons from the bed of his awful death and flung around the couch. Every torture the demons could inflict, the same pains he intended for Lawrence in his passion, pressed in united virulence on the tyrant; from morn till night he cried out in piercing agony, "O Lawrence! I beseech you give me some relief." He had no pity for Lawrence, and the demons will not have it for him now. The palace was filled with grief. Physicians were baffled; no wealth nor power could afford a moment's relief.

Tryphonia, his wife, terrified at his awful condition, and knowing from his utterances that he was tortured on account of the Christians, ordered liberty to be given to all who were in prison for the name of Christ. On this occasion the Mamertine, the Claudian, and the keeps of the Agonal Circus \* were opened to the suffering followers of Christ; but the tyrant was weighed in the just balance of eternal justice, and when he had suffered all the excruciating pangs he had intended for his guiltless victim, still uttering unmeaning blasphemies against the God of the Christians, with screams of agony that ring from the death-bed of the despairing, he gave up his soul to the demons.

Tryphonia and her daughter Cyrilla were converted by this awful judgment of God, and were baptized by Justin. Tryphonia died a holy and happy death. Cyrilla was martyred for the faith, in all the bloom of her virginity, under the Emperor Claudius. Forty-six soldiers, with their wives and children, were also converted, and were afterwards martyred outside the Salarian Gate with one hundred and twenty others, who

\* Now the prison of St. Agnes, in the Piazza Navona.

were the harvest of the martyrs' blood. At the martyrdom of this numerous household four soldiers, named Theodosius, Lucius, Marcus, and Peter, stepped forward and begged they might be put to death first, with the noble intention of giving courage to the others by their own brave encounter of death.

## IV.

WE will close these thrilling scenes of martyrdom with a few facts connected with the relics and devotion that have existed in after-ages towards the heroes of this sketch.

He who cast sympathy into the pagan heart to make the very executioners of the Christians respect their sacred remains; who sent lightnings through a cloudless sky to frighten away the night-watches placed over the martyred dead; who ordered his servants by angelic messengers to give honorable interment to the victims of pagan cruelty, saved from obloquy and disrespect the remains of the aged nurse of Hippolytus.

The holy priest Justin, like another Tobias, indefatigable in his zeal in seeking

the bodies of the martyrs, had found all the bodies of these Acts except one; it was that of Concordia. The good priest prayed and fasted, that God would deign to let him know where he could find the body of the martyred nurse. He knew they had cast it with contempt into some sewer or cloaca. If the Christians had saved it, some sepulchral monument in the Catacombs would have declared her triumph and sleep of peace. But day after day he watched, and no mournful procession passed the gloomy corridors of the dead, bringing him the treasure he earnestly sought. The feelings of humanity, refined and elevated under the purifying influence of Christian love, demand our feeble efforts to honor the departed, to cast around the bier of the loved one the homage of affectionate memories and regrets. Towards those who have ended life in the odors of sanctity, whose deaths are precious, all feelings merge into religious awe and veneration. Thus was the respect for the martyred dead of the early Church ; it was deep, holy, and sincere.

Justin's zeal was rewarded. One day a

strange man came to see him. He was in charge of some sewers of the city, and was secretly a Christian. He stated to Justin that a soldier had told him in great secrecy where the body of Concordia was concealed, and he believed she had still some ornaments and jewels, gifts of her master, at the time of her death, and promised to share the spoils with him if he would assist him to get them. Having consented, he came to acquaint Justin of the discovery. Justin and the *cloacarius* went together to the spot indicated; they found the body incorrupt, but without any gold treasures, as they shrewdly guessed beforehand. It was itself a treasure more valuable than its weight in gold.\* They brought it to the garden of Cyriacus, where they laid it near the other victims of this terrible persecution.

## V.

It happened in the time Alexander II. reigned in the chair of Peter, and

\* "Et invenit sacrum corpus incontaminatum, quærens autem in vestibus ejus nihil repererunt."—*Acts Surius.*

Henry was King of Saxony, there lived a man as remarkable for his wealth as for his crimes. Loaded with many vices, stained with many a dark deed of crime, he had, however, one virtue—it was devotion towards St. Lawrence. Every year he celebrated his festival with extraordinary zeal for the glory of this saint. He procured that lights should be burnt in his church the whole night of the vigil of the festival, and the divine Office sung by different choirs of priests and deacons whom he brought from surrounding districts and rewarded as if conferring a favor on himself. On his festival he gave large alms to the poor, many of whom he also entertained in his own palace. But the most remarkable expression of his piety, and one which is extraordinary in the legend we are about to relate, was the gift of a splendid gold chalice to the church of the saint.\*

His charity, his devotion, though perhaps alone and strange, like a solitary star in a clouded night, was not forgotten by

\* *Calicem aureum miro opere compositum cum duabus manicis fieri fecit.*

the glorious martyr, who is powerful in heaven. He gained for this man grace to make acts of perfect contrition at the hour of death, and, although dying with the stamp of guilt in the judgment of men, yet was saved in the judgment of God. It pleased the Almighty to let this fact be known by an extraordinary allegory or vision shown to a holy hermit who lived in a little cell retired from the world, and spent his days in prayer and preparation for eternity, near the district where this rich man lived, and for whose complete conversion this holy hermit often prayed.

One beautiful night, when all was still, the moon shining in the brilliant plenitude of her subdued light, this holy man was wrapt in prayer. Suddenly he heard the noise and shout of people approaching his cell; as they came near he heard laughter, clapping of hands, and unearthly screams which betoken great joy. Disturbed and wondering, he went to the window of his little cell to see the cause of this strange nocturnal gathering in that lonely place. He saw a crowd of horrid-looking men carrying the body of a dead man in the

greatest precipitation and haste. The hermit called one of the men, who was at the outskirt of the crowd, and said to him, ‘Who are you, and what brings you here?’

He answered: “I can't wait to tell you now; for I must follow my companions to be present at the victory we have gained over this man, who is dead.”

The saint, understanding they were demons hurrying to the judgment of some poor soul, said: “I command you by the eternal judgment to return to me and tell me whatever happens.” The demon, promising to obey, ran after the others, who had already disappeared in the darkness.

After an hour had passed behold the same multitude of malignant spirits returned and passed again by the hermit's cell; but now weeping, howling with grief, moving slowly with downcast looks, and wringing their hands, showing signs of terrible sorrow. Seeing their confusion and shame, the man of God was anxiously awaiting the demon he had bound to return to learn the meaning of this extraordinary proceeding. The demon came. He spoke thus to the hermit:

"I am ashamed to tell you the disgrace that has fallen on me and my companions. Know that this man who has just died was a public sinner. He was a robber, a perjurer, and an adulterer; in fact, he had no virtues and many vices. Well, he died, and of course we came to take him, as you have seen. But when we came to the judgment, the angel who had the care of him said, 'There is no use in coming here; for he is mine.' But we showed him the book in which all his evil deeds were written, and then the angel showed us a book in which were written his good actions; and in the dispute we agreed to put them into the scales. We did so, and the good book went right up in the air, and ours weighed the scales down to the ground. We set up a shout of joy that reached to heaven, when immediately appeared Lawrence—that man that was burned—bearing the sign of the cross in his right hand. 'What's this?' said he. 'Justice must be done.' Saying this, he drew from his bosom a golden chalice, and, casting it violently into the lighter side of the scales, broke one of its handles. Our side went up then, and Law-

rence, taking the soul of the dead man, brought it with him to heaven. Seeing this, our prince and all my companions were turned from great joy into grief, and covered with shame and sorrow. You see them returning from the judgment. And if you doubt my word, send one of your disciples into the city, and you will find the man who has given the chalice to the church is dead, and the chalice is broken; moreover, he will find the priests disputing who broke it, each one suspecting the other."

Having spoken thus, the demon got permission to join his companions; and the hermit understood how God wished him to know that, by the intercession of St. Lawrence, this man had obtained the grace of conversion. He passed the remainder of the night in prayer, thanking God for the glory he was pleased to give to his saints.

By daybreak next morning he sought the hut of a disciple on the side of a neighboring hill, and, without explaining what had happened, the man of God bade him "go into the city and enquire if the Count Henry be dead; and, going to the church, ask to see the chalice he gave in

honor of St. Lawrence, and, if there be a dispute amongst the priests about it, tell them to come to me and I will set matters right."

The disciple went to the city, wondering at the commission given him by the holy hermit. All happened as made known to him: the wealthy man had died suddenly during the night, and the whole city was in great terror; for they knew he led a bad life. Then, in the church, the chalice was shown, and the dispute arose who broke it. The priests came to the servant of God, who narrated his vision. The city was filled with joy; Masses were celebrated, the Te Deum chanted, and the devotion of the people towards the glorious martyr increased a hundredfold.

Of the broken chalice, we find its after-history somewhat doubtful. One MS. says it was sent to Rome to the Basilica of St. Lawrence; but one of the abbots, with more virtue than wisdom, broke it up to make other chalices.\*

\* "Sed abbas predicti loci zelum Dei habens, sed non secundum scientiam, eundem calicem fregit," etc.—*Bollandists*, 10th Aug.

Another version states that the chalice was preserved in the Cathedral Church of Bamberg, where it may be seen, in an altered form, to the present day.

This strange vision seems to have some semblance of truth about it, but most probably referred to the Emperor Henry II., as it is related by Cuspin in his life of that good king. We will not enter into the learned enquiry instituted by the Bollandists. The incident, having the semblance of truth, reminds us forcibly of the power of the martyrs in heaven, and that charity obtained, in the end, the conversion of the sinner, covering a multitude of sins.

## VI.

THE following extraordinary miracle, connected with the origin of a Church of St. Lawrence in Constantinople, is touchingly beautiful :

“One of the emperors of this city lost his sight. Knowing that St. Lawrence was from of old the friend and patron of the blind, he determined to make a pilgrimage to the shrine of this great martyr in

Rome. His spouse, an amiable and virtuous woman, tried to dissuade him from such a long and dangerous journey. He insisted; at length she seemed to consent, but had prepared an ingenious stratagem to retain him. She justly believed that St. Lawrence was as powerful in Constantinople as in Rome. She therefore determined to erect a church in his honor in votive offering to God for the favor of her husband's sight. In the meantime she had arranged with the captain of one of the galleys to take the emperor every day to sea, and make him fancy he was on his way to Rome. Returning every afternoon to the same port, they called it by the name of the one they would have taken were they really making such a journey. This went on for several weeks; in the meantime the church was rising in splendor and magnificence. At length, when nearly completed, the sailors announced to the emperor they were now near Naples and Pozzuoli.\* His devotion and anxiety to kneel at the shrine of his beloved saint increased as he thought he was nearer to it.

\* The modern name for the port of Baiae.

"The morning of the consecration of the beautiful church had arrived. The emperor was landed by the way at Ostia, and was driven into the country, so as to make a tour of about fourteen miles, and then dropped at the Church of St. Lawrence. To make the deception more perfect, the empress had arranged that none should approach the emperor but those that spoke Latin. The emperor knelt, and with tears of devotion heard Mass and received Holy Communion. He thought he had a dream. He began to discern, as yet indistinctly, the lights on the altar and the golden vestments. Then the vision became clearer; he was able to see everything in detail. The church he had never seen before, and he firmly believed he was in the Basilica of St. Lawrence at Rome. He started to see beside him his wife and children. Believing he was given but a momentary vision of the joys of sight, he prayed more fervently than ever to St. Lawrence. But it was no vision; he rubbed his eyes again and again, and each object became more distinct. Mass was over; his spouse, who

watched his trepidation, knew he had received his sight, and in tears of joy embraced him. In a few words she told him of her pious stratagem to keep him in Constantinople, and in joy, wonder, and gratitude she led him into his own city again, where he was greeted by the welcome acclamations of his people.” \*

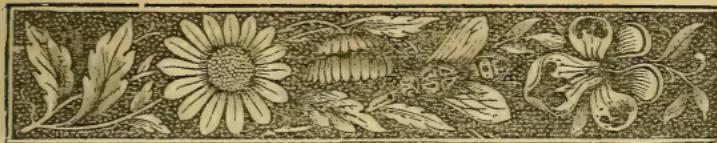
St. Lawrence is usually painted as dressed in the dalmatic. This is intended to signify his clerical dignity; but up to the time of Pope Stephen—that is, three or four years before the martyrdom of St. Lawrence—the deacons carried their dalmatics about in public on almost every occasion. It would be a novelty in our days to see deacons going through the streets with their robes; however, not so in ancient times. The dalmatic was a pagan garment; it was worn by the emperors Commodus and Pertinax, and afterwards generally by senators. It fell into disuse, and was adopted by Pope Sylvester for the Church. He was so jealous

\* This fact is related by St. Peter Damian in his eighth book and fifth epistle.

of the honor of this vestment that no deacon outside of Rome was permitted to wear it without special permission.\*

\* See "Emerologio di Piazza," vol. i.





## CHAPTER XI.

PALMATIUS.

(May 10, 226.)

**T**HERE are seventy churches in Rome dedicated to the Blessed Virgin. Pilgrims who pour into the Eternal City from every land under the sun recognize how the Romans honor her whom all nations call Blessed. When they see so many beautiful edifices dedicated to God under her invocation, so many paintings and statues, enriched with jewels and pearls of value, so many novenas and benedictions in her honor, and, above all, the unbroken crowd of suppliants that, from the break of dawn until the last notes of the Ave Maria bells have ushered in the night, kneel in silent prayer around the altars of Mary, they exclaim: "How these people love the Madonna!" For some 'tis a source of con-

gratulation and joy; others, who, alas! are buried in the darkness of the shadow of fatal prejudice, make the theme of their sarcasms what they inwardly admire.

Sixteen centuries ago Mary had her altars and churches and her clients in Rome. That devotion, commenced and practised by the Archangel Gabriel in the little room at Nazareth, twined with the development of Catholic faith, and still blooms as the fairest flower around the full-grown tree. In the commencement of the third century the holy Pope Callistus raised and consecrated to the Blessed Virgin the first public church erected in Rome. It was built over the site of an extraordinary fountain of oil which sprang up here three years before the birth of our Blessed Lord, in the district of Trastevere. This church exists still, and, as it was the scene of the conversion of Palmatius in the third century, a few historical facts will agreeably introduce us to the Acts of our present sketch.

The history of this church brings us back to the reign of Augustus. In the commencement of his reign he erected

in this spot an asylum for aged or invalided soldiers, somewhat like the Hôtel des Invalides of Napoleon at Paris. This institution failed with the kind spirit that gave it origin. In the tyranny and inhumanity that characterized the successors of Augustus there was no place for sympathy or gratitude for the poor soldier who was disabled in the service of his country. The splendid barracks erected by Augustus became an eating-house, a rendezvous for all kinds of vagrants, and finally, in the reign of Alexander Severus, was abandoned.

The Christians took possession of it. Immediately the former owners, who had no more right to the place than the Christians, tried to dislodge them. A dispute followed, and the case was submitted to Alexander for decision. Alexander gave it in favor of the Christians, saying it was better some God should be worshipped there than hand it over to gluttons and drunkards.

It was well known the Christians intended to convert it into a place of worship, and this may have been a stimulant to

the pagans to keep them out of it. The youthful Emperor Alexander not only gave them the building, but full permission to convert it into a church. This emperor had a Christian mother, and showed such partiality towards Christianity that he would have embraced the faith were it not for the impious advisers that surrounded him and deterred him from the step he premeditated. He never went further than to place our Blessed Lord amongst the Penates of his house. He was so taken with that maxim of Christian charity, "*Do unto others as you would wish others to do to you,*" he had it printed over the doors of the palace and on some of the public institutions of the city. Nevertheless, as if in mockery of this golden proverb, the spirits of evil procured, through the machinations of the imperial favorites, that some of the best blood of the Church should flow in this reign. The Christians, however, took advantage of the clemency of the emperor during the commencement of his reign, and, under the guidance of the holy Pope Callistus, built from the barracks of Augustus the first public church

ever raised in pagan Rome, and dedicated it to the Blessed Virgin—the first in Rome under her invocation. This was in the year 224.

The Christians had long desired to have possession of this place; for, by a strange event, it would seem destined by Providence for a place of worship. About the time of the birth of our Blessed Lord in Bethlehem a miraculous fountain of oil sprang from the earth in this spot, and was interpreted to be symbolic of the great mystery of the Nativity. The oil flowed for a whole day. The place is shown even now before the high altar of the church, and it is confidently asserted that the clay around will even still give the unction of oil on being pressed.\* Some verses that were written on the spot in one of the early centuries are still preserved:

“Magna taberna fui tunc emeritoria dicta  
Emeritis adscribens virtus, vitaque relictæ  
Hinc oleum fluxit, cum Christus Virgine luxit:  
Hic et donatur venia quodcunque rogatur.

Baronius alludes to this extraordinary fountain of oil. Treating of the origin of

\* Baronius, anno 224.

the Church and doings of Pope Callistus, amongst others we find these records: "For in the book 'De Romanis Pontificibus,' known to all for its antiquity, we have these words: 'He built the Church of Holy Mary in Trastevere,' whence it must necessarily be asserted that to no other church is allusion made except this, built in the time of Alexander, and in the place given to the Christians for this purpose; there is even still extant a most remarkable monument of venerable antiquity of this noble and generous act, for near the confessional of the church there is preserved the opening from which oil formerly issued. It is related also, by those who found it by experience, that the clay around is still soaked with oil, so that if any one press it with his hand he will find the impression." \*

We will not pause to answer the many questions that could be asked about this strange fountain of oil. We find a great many writers mention the circumstance with the greatest reverence, and then pass on. No doubt it is a difficult question.

\* "Annal," anno 224.

By a critical analysis of the dates we find it took place three years before the birth of our Blessed Lord, and in the third of Augustus. They were not simultaneous, as the ancient verses quoted suppose. We are not bound to treat it as a miracle, but must throw it in amongst the many and inexplicable works of God preserved in the treasures of the Church under the protection of pious tradition.\*

In the erection of this church the holy Pope placed an image of the Blessed Virgin, which is still preserved, in the chapel of the choir. Before this image St. Cecilia often prayed, as her house was quite near; here, too, innumerable saints, pontiffs, martyrs, and glorious confessors of the Church have implored the intercession of the Mother of God. This little picture, before which the faithful have knelt from the commencement of the third century (224), as well as the church raised over it under the invocation of the Mother of

\* The oil is not petroleum, nor yet olive. It sprang up in several places in the neighborhood. It is alluded to by St. Jerome in one of his epistles to Pammachius; by him also, in the popular tradition of his time (fifth century), considered a sacred sign.

God, must confound the unblushing heretics of modern days who assert that we knew nothing of devotion to Mary until it crept into our liturgies in the darkness of the Middle Ages.

The present form of the Church dates from the year 340, when under St. Julian it was enlarged and embellished with grander designs of architecture. It has been an object of special devotion to nearly all the popes, and in almost every century we find this church mentioned in connection with the protection and generosity of the Holy See. In the Middle Ages cardinals and princes vied with each other in enriching this venerable sanctuary, and their united efforts have left it to the generations of our days what the generosity and zeal of the first Christians made it in theirs. Amongst the benefactors and friends of this church the last, and by no means the least, was our own immortal Pius IX.

In latter centuries, when so many magnificent temples have been erected on every side to the glory of God; when new ideas and designs of architecture

were more pleasing than the old, this venerable sanctuary was almost forgotten. Five years ago it showed five centuries of ruin and wear; the walls discolored, the Alexandrine pavement broken, and the faded gilding of the artistic roof contrasted in dull heaviness with the rich colors of Domenichino's "Assumption." The gloom of age and dust, which seemed accumulating for centuries, were to the inexperienced stranger the strongest indications of its venerable antiquity. In the days of his liberty Pius IX. was wont to visit the venerable sanctuaries of the city. One evening he bent his way towards this ancient church of our Holy Mother. His noble heart was moved on seeing the havoc that time had made on the venerable pile, and, notwithstanding his straitened circumstances, with unbounded confidence in God, he gave the order for its complete renovation. Nearly two years have passed since the work has been finished, and the aged Pope, who has been a prisoner in the Vatican, has not been able to see it. We hope the day is not far off when this generous and persecuted

pastor will kneel in triumph before the hidden God of the Blessed Sacrament—the beauty of whose temple he had loved—and before the image of the Queen of Heaven venerated by Callistus in the third century, to pour forth the warm hymn of gratitude for the protection of her who is more terrible than armies set in battle array.

## II.

THE Acts of Palmatius, one of the most remarkable of the Christians confined in the Mamertine, bring us to an extraordinary scene that passed at this venerable sanctuary in the third century. The dreadful calamities that fell on the city, and were indirectly the cause of the conversion of an immense number of the citizens, are mentioned by pagan historians, and, amongst the Christians, by Orosius, Sulpicius Severus, etc.

On the morning of the 5th of April, 226, the Temple of Jupiter, on the Capitol, was on fire. Gold flowed like a molten stream of lead from the roof, and the costly mar-

bles were splintered and calcined in the raging conflagration. The lightning of heaven had struck this proud monument of paganism; the impieties of its sacrifices seemed to rouse the anger of God, and for three days fire, pestilence, and ruin brooded over the mighty city. The people, filled with consternation, rushed to their temples and called in vain on their senseless idols. The hypocritical augurs, who pretended to know the reasons of every calamity, ordered the mantuaria, or expiatory holocausts, to be immolated on the Capitol alongside of the burning temple; but, like remedies that hasten the evil they are intended to prevent, the public sacrifice called from the chastening hand of God still greater calamities. During the sacrifice four of the priests were struck dead, and the altar was reduced to ashes; the sun became dim, and lurid flashes of lightning lit up the scene of terror with a brighter light than the columns of fire that mounted with hissing roar from the blazing piles of buildings. In madness and despair the terrified populace fled from the city; the dead were left unburied, and the

most costly treasures abandoned; temples, baths, and villas, for miles around the gates, were filled with timid matrons and virgins, who fled like doves to shelter from the storm.

Amidst this universal terror there was one scene of calm and quiet. Gathered in the chapel of the venerable Pontiff Callistus, a small but brave band of Christians were chanting the Psalms of David. Like the enchanting sounds of the Æolian harp, heard loud and shrill above the storm and the sighing of the forest-trees, the sacred strains rolled in subdued echoes through the abandoned streets, mingling in majestic sweetness with the thunder that shook the seven hills.

Through the Trastevere district there came a chariot at full speed. It belonged to Palmatius, the consul, who was flying from the city. It approached the little chapel of the Blessed Virgin. The consul paused to hear the strange sounds—surprise was stronger than fear—and mysterious words fell on his attentive ears:

“Our God is our refuge and protector. He is our aid in the tribulations that have come too heavily on us.

"Therefore we will not fear when the earth shall be shaken and the mountains transferred to the depths of the sea.

"Their waters roared and were troubled: the mountains were troubled with his strength.

"The stream of the river maketh the city of God joyful: the Most High had sanctified his own tabernacle. God is in the midst thereof, it shall not be moved: God will help it in the morning early.

"Nations were troubled, and kingdoms were bowed down: he uttered his voice, the earth trembled. The Lord of armies is with us: the God of Jacob is our protector.

"Come and behold ye the works of the Lord: what wonders he hath done upon the earth, making wars to cease even to the end thereof.

"He shall destroy the bow and break the weapons: and the shields he shall burn in the fire.

"Be still and see that I am God: I will be exalted among the nations, and I will be exalted in the earth.

"The Lord of armies is with us: the God of Jacob is our protector."—*45th Psalm.*

Little did Palmatius dream, while listening to the strange, solemn chant of the Christians, that he heard a prophecy, a sublime anticipation of the triumph of grace to commence in his own conversion, and which, after centuries of persecution and trial, would be realized in the triumph of the Church against which he was at that moment breathing death and destruction.

He enquired who were those who had courage to assemble and lift their voices with cheerful sounds in the midst of the public woe. He was informed they were Christians. "Magicians," muttered the consul, as he turned his horse's head and proceeded at full gallop to the emperor's palace. Filled with the popular prejudice, he believed the Christians were a set of magicians whose incantations were the cause of the calamities that oppressed the people. Hearing the mysterious verses of their prayer, he at once concluded he had come across the workshop of their impiety—the darkened chamber whence, by magic arts, they evoked from the regions of Pluto the cloud of woe that brooded over the city. He hastened to convey his important discovery to the Prefect Ulpian. Bounding through the marble portico and rushing through the palace, he entered the chamber where the impious Ulpian trembled as each peal of the dreadful thunder shook his coward heart. Almost breathless, Palmatius cried out: "Listen, I beseech you, to what I have found! When sad and frightened at these awful calamities, and

flying through Trastevere, I heard a multitude of Christians uttering their magic verses. What wonder these terrors have come on us?"\*

A guard of a hundred soldiers is given to the zealous consul, and full powers to deal with the Christian magicians found *flagrante delicto*—the crime of worshipping the true God. Palmatius and his soldiers are marching across the city. We will go before them in the quicker transit of thought, and glance at the scene so simply described in the ancient Acts, so dear in the memories of the martyrs of the early Church, and so interesting in the reminiscences that hang around the venerable Basilica of Sta. Maria in Trastevere.

Humble and unassuming must have been the first church erected by the Christians in Rome. The toleration that allowed them to creep from the Catacombs did not declare them not to be molested; they were still in the enemy's camp, and

\* "Per claritatem vestram, ego audivi cum tristis et tritus essem propter signum quod factum est quomodo canticis et incantationibus in quodam loco clamaret, in regione Trans-Tiberim, multitudo Christianorum; unde non mirum si causæ hæc fecit hoc signum."—*Acts Bollandists.*

the least manifestation of increasing strength would fan the smouldering embers into persecution. Yet the fact that in the year 226, they had a church publicly in Rome, that they assembled under the noonday sun, and chanted and prayed loud enough to be heard in the streets, prove the comparatively free and prosperous condition of Christianity at the time. To Callistus, the venerable pontiff, who was the sixteenth after St. Peter, is due the erection and consecration of this church—one of the most remarkable events in the history of those times. Tradition attributes to St. Ignatius, martyred in the Coliseum, the custom of chanting the Psalms alternately in choir. In a vision he saw the angels thus praising God, and the Christians were wont to assemble at this epoch to pray in this manner. Callistus placed in his little chapel a small but beautiful picture of the Madonna. Around this shrine of early piety they gathered to recite their prayers, as we do now, like them, and in union with them, before the same Madonna and before the same altar, after the lapse of sixteen centuries. There

was the proverbial and undying lamp that burns even now before the Madonna's altar, expressing in its living flame the burning charity of the clients of the immaculate Queen of Heaven; flowers, fresh and fragrant, culled from the soil that covers the hallowed Catacombs in the villa of some noble Roman matron; vases still bearing the costly ornaments of pagan art.

The little Christian band are kneeling before the altar of Mary; the women apart, and their heads covered with a neat embroidered veil; the men wrapped in the manly toga. Their earnestness of look and voice bespeak trepidation. The elements are in confusion around them; thunder is pealing, the lightning has set fire to the city and struck the people. The Christians knew it was but the breath of God, the sigh of divine indignation at the impiety of man, sweeping, as the prophet tells us, like a whirlwind of wrath over a guilty world, spreading desolation and woe, and visiting with condign retribution the hapless children of sin. Yet, in those mysterious visitations of Providence that

afflict the innocent with the guilty, the Christians, in the natural impulse of terrified humanity, rushed to the temple of the true God, and sought by prayers to appease his indignation.

Whilst the gentle murmur of their fervent prayer rolls in subdued echoes to the street, the tramp of soldiers approaches, and Palmatius, with a guard of one hundred soldiers, surrounds the little church. Amongst them, too, was the aged priest Calepodius.

Ten soldiers were ordered to enter, but, having done so, they were immediately struck blind. Calepodius said to them: "My children, what do you seek here?" But they replied, "Give us light; for this place is darkened to us." They hastened down to their companions, who were all terrified, and none more than the brave consul who sought to destroy those Christians. Palmatius hurried back to Ulpian, to whom he reported what had happened. Ulpian, not giving full credence to the strange fact, had the soldiers brought before him, and, seeing that they were really deprived of sight, in a blindness of heart and intellect darker than the loss of sight

in those poor wretches, he cried out: "O good citizens! see the power of magic."

Palmatius, who was listening, and whose confidence in paganism was shaken, said: "If this be the power of magic, where is the power of our gods? You had better influence them, or the whole state will perish under such magic."

Then the wiseacres, who represented the young emperor, ordered a grand sacrifice to be offered from the Capitol to the god Mercury, and all the people were to be present. Any one absent was to be considered a Christian and put to death. A crier was sent through the streets to announce the great sacrifice and the penalties to be inflicted on any one absent. In pandering to the popular prejudice, and calling the people of the city together, they were but obeying the inscrutable counsels of God, who thus wished to draw some noble souls from the pollution and degradation of idolatry. On the morning appointed the Capitol and Forum were crowded by the Romans, who were more influenced by fear of the edicts than religion towards their gods.

The more wealthy and sincere, like Palmatius, brought their own animals to be slaughtered in the great appeasing sacrifice.

The blood of the animals had scarcely commenced to flow around the idol when one of the virgins of the temple, named Juliana, was seized by the devil, and cried out: "The God of Callistus is the only true and living God; he is enraged with the pollutions of the state, and will ruin your perishable kingdom, because you do not adore the truth."

Almighty God would crumble a whole city into a wreck of ruin for the salvation of one soul. He blasted the sacrifices of the Capitol, he allowed the demon to take possession of his creatures, and dispersed the people in terror, that Palmatius might recognize him to be the true God. It was so. The noble consul ran alone towards the Church of the Holy Virgin in Trastevere, and, casting himself at the feet of Callistus, prayed for baptism. He declared his renunciation of the demons and idolatry in a loud voice before the multitude of Christians.

Palmatius received baptism with great fervor; he wept with joy, and our Blessed Lord imparted to him a vision, by which he understood the invisible descent of the Holy Spirit into the soul at the moment expressed by the external contact of the water of the sacrament. His wife and children and whole household, numbering forty-two persons, were baptized on the same day; and so perfect was the conversion of this noble consul that, before the sunset on him as a Christian, he had gathered immense wealth in heaven by distributing his goods to the poor. With incredible zeal he sought out the Christians, in the prisons, in the Catacombs, or poorer streets of the city, and gave to each one food, clothing, and money, as they declared their wants. For thirty-two days he went among the poor, spreading blessings and happiness, and thus spent the novitiate which was to prepare him for the public profession of Christianity.

Amongst the innumerable miracles and wonders recorded in every page of the Acts of the martyrs, there is none, perhaps, so striking as the sudden change that passed

over the proud soul of the pagan, implanting in the heart a love for poverty and the poor where the infatuation of riches and pleasures had blasted every feeling of sympathy. Divine was the faith that made consuls and senators and brave generals of the army despise their wealth and their honors, and seek the contempt of poverty. No wonder the Romans marvelled when they saw proud and beautiful matrons casting their garments of purple and gold, and jewels of priceless value, to the poor they met in the streets. They were true Christians, and they knew how pleasing to God was this virtue of charity; they considered it infinitely more valuable than the perishable goods they cast from them. Their holy compassion made no distinction of persons. Their alms descended as a gentle shower on the Jew and pagan, as well as on their own indigent brethren; and the idolaters were struck with these new virtues, which their unbelieving society, withered by absorbing selfishness, did not understand.

Lucian, who, amongst the degenerate Greeks, professed a double atheism—for

he did not believe either in Providence or virtue—recounts with sarcastic wonder that the legislator of the Christians had persuaded them they were all brothers; and he records the prodigies of their generosity, their distant travels, their immense sacrifices, whenever there was question of relieving any of the unfortunate.

When the Christian soldiers who were made prisoners on the field of battle were led captive to the dark forests of Germany, a deacon followed them with their ransom, to make up which the sacred vessels of the yet poor Church had been sold. When the imperial legions traversed a district where every family offered them the best grapes of the vineyard, the whitest bread, the purest wine, and freshest water, it was known by this generosity to be inhabited by Christians.\* Who raised from the marble steps of the Temple of Jupiter or Mars the dying slave whom his master's sordid avarice had abandoned to starvation? The Christian who, perhaps, the evening before had escaped the toils and tortures

\* "Life of St. Pachomius."

of paganism. And who picked up the new-born infant which a Roman mother had thrown at night to the dogs on the banks of the Tiber? A servant of Jesus Christ. The charity of the early Christians acted on the pagan world as warm waves on the ice of a long winter. It bore a secret influence equal to the conviction of miracles; it anticipated the triumph of faith in the hardest hearts by winning them first to humanity before they became converts to religion.

A rich man named Serapion was walking one day alone in the country and reading one of the sacred books, when he was met by a poor, half-naked creature, to whom he gave his cloak. Soon after he met another still more miserable in appearance. Serapion gave him his tunic, and now was himself more unprovided with clothes than those whom he had relieved. He sat down on a broken column and continued to read, without reflecting on the strange situation to which his charity had reduced him. "Brother," said a passer-by compassionately, "who has stripped you of your garments?" "The

Gospel that I am reading," replied Serapion.\*

The time appointed by God has come. He will allow the powers of darkness to vent their rage on the soul he has elected and prove it to be true. *Palmatius* is seized and cast into the prison of the Mamertine. Three days are spent in this gloomy and horrible dungeon. He who a few days before commanded thousands of slaves, and had a palace for his home, and endless wealth to gratify every wish, is now poor and despised in the cell of a criminal, and the cold, hard rock of the Mamertine is the pillow of his bed. "We thought their lives a folly," is the sigh of the hundreds who have passed the barriers of the tomb. Happy those who, like *Palmatius*, have learned the secret of true wisdom in time, that they may not sigh over its loss in the endless ages of eternity.

On the third day he was brought in chains before Alexander. The interview is given in the *Acts*. It is brief but interesting. Seeing him chained, Alexander ordered the chains to be taken off, and said:

\* "Fleurs de Ciel," Orsini.

"Thus you have become mad, Palmatius, to abandon the gods and worship a Man that is dead." Palmatius was silent. Then Alexander again said, "Speak confidently, and do not be afraid."

Palmatius replied, "If you give permission I will speak the truth."

"But say nothing against our gods," interposed Alexander.

"If you take notice, good prince," said Palmatius, "they are not gods, but the works of mortal men; what they are you judge for yourself. I pray you, miserable as I am, you will make your gods speak and answer a question I will ask; if you do this, I will not abandon them."

"But how? you have adored them from your cradle, and now you abandon them," said Alexander.\*

Palmatius replied, "I have acted so, unfortunately; but now that I know what is true, I pray my Lord Jesus Christ to forgive me, for I sinned in error."

\* An observant reader will remark in this question how humanity in its weakness will repeat itself, as well as history in its follies. The most popular, and for thousands the only, defence for Protestantism is in the expression, "Oh! it is the religion in which I was brought up."

But see, Alexander smiles ! No executioners are called; no racks, or pans of burning oil, or iron hooks to tear the martyr's sides! It pleased God to spare Palmatius a while longer for the conversion of others, and to try him by a species of trial more powerful than racks or scourges. Near Alexander stood the noble senator Simplicius, a friend and admirer of the brave consul in his trouble; turning towards him, Alexander said to him: "Simplicius, take this man to your house, and by every kindness in your power endeavor to induce him to submit to the gods; the empire has need of such men as Palmatius."

As salvation entered with our Blessed Lord into the home of Zachary, so the light of faith entered with Palmatius the home of the senator. The good Simplicius left nothing undone to make his guest happy. He tore off the prison-dress, and clothed him with rich purple and gold; he ordered his wife and children and servants to obey the consul in everything. We doubt not but the house of Simplicius became the scene of great rejoicing; for the

family of the consul gathered around their liberated father; the Christians, who had loved him as their benefactor, and were proud of him as their champion, gathered around to greet him with tears and blessings; the aged successor of St. Peter and the venerable priest Calepodius came from their sanctuary in Trastevere to console and encourage for greater trials the courageous neophyte whom they knew to be destined for a glorious martyrdom. But Palmatius was already skilled in the science that makes saints. He knew a calm in the midst of such storms was too treacherous to last; that a truce with the demons was but a stratagem in their warfare, to come down with greater fury when he might be less prepared. Therefore he gave himself to fasting and prayer; he found that ineffable sweetness that falls like dew on the soul that seeks God in prayer and solitude, and which is never found in the noisy assemblies of men.

The conversion of the good senator and his household comes next in the order of events. It happened thus: There was a friend and familiar of the household of

Simplicius, named Felix. His wife was four years bedridden with a palsy. Felix had seen and heard all that passed within the last few days, and, urged by the invisible impulses of grace, he sought an interview with Palmatius, to whom he told his deep affliction. Not only had he the sorrow of his spouse Blanda, crippled and in pain, but his means were all spent, and, in the cold blast of misfortune that swept over his house, he had nothing before him but the bleak prospect of poverty and ruin. His tale moved the pity of the noble heart of Palmatius, who, without further enquiry, mingled his tears with those of Felix, whom he embraced with all the tenderness of Christian sympathy, bidding him kneel and raise his heart to the true God. And regardless of the presence of the wife of Simplicius and others, who were present during the interview, he prayed thus to God: "O Lord God! who hast enlightened thy servant, give still the eternal light of Jesus Christ; raise thy servant Blanda from the bed of sorrow, that all may know thou art our Creator and the Author of all things."

Palmatius had scarcely ceased his prayer when a bustle is heard outside, and several voices repeat, "Blanda! Blanda!" And, true enough, there was Blanda herself, running to cast herself before Palmatius and ask for baptism. Almighty God, who knew his servant Palmatius would ask the favor, anticipated his prayer, and, raising the afflicted Blanda, who had not moved a limb for four years, sent her running to the house of Simplicius, that she might arrive just as Palmatius was finishing his prayer. The scene that followed was cheering beyond measure. In the midst of tears, and embracings, and exclamations of joy the whole house of Simplicius declared their wish to become Christians. Callistus and Calepodius were sent for to complete by their spiritual ministrations the work commenced in heaven. The holy Pope poured the regenerating waters of baptism on sixty-eight persons, and, with a holy joy and thanksgiving to God, repeated the words of the Psalmist: "Congreget Dominus triticum in horreum suum."

Brief but thrilling the few words of

the Acts that follow. In five lines they declare what might fill pages of horror to describe. Whilst yet in the flush of their spiritual joy an army of soldiers are surrounding the house of Simplicius.

The order is given, and the halls of the senator flow with the blood of the Christians. Aged domestics who had served two generations of the family; tender females who were maids of honor, in bloom of youth and beauty; the children of Simplicius, whose wealth and ambition were laid as the richest offerings on the Christian altar; the venerable Simplicius and his faithful spouse, willingly bending their necks to the swords that were already stained with the blood of their children, changing their earthly palace for an everlasting one beyond the skies; and the glorious Palmatius, like a brave general on a bloody field of battle, standing undaunted amidst the carnage, and waving the standard of the cross, declaring to the dying the victory they have won—all were swept away in the space of a few hours, and the only record left us of this awful carnage is that the heads

of those victims were suspended at the gates of the city, "ad exemplum Christianorum."





## CHAPTER XII.

NEMESIUS.

(October 31, 256.)

“Sweet childhood, shadow of celestial love,  
Trained to look up and hold a parent’s hand,  
And ever lift the eyes to One above,  
Which knows not yet while it obeys command—  
Hopes all, and all believes.”

### I.

**P**ERHAPS one of the most interesting of the sketches of the martyrs connected with the Mamertine and the “Domine, quo vadis?” is that of Nemesius.

He was a colonel in the army. His wife died and left him an only child, a little girl, who after her baptism was called Lucilla; her pagan name we do not know. This child was born blind. Her father loved her still more on account of her affliction. He lavished all the affec-

tions of his noble heart on the poor child. He attended to all her little wants, and led her about himself. God, in his merciful providence, took pity on this afflicted father and his innocent child, and, giving corporal sight to the latter, cast the light of heaven on the spiritual blindness of both. The virtues of Pope Stephen, and the miracles he performed in the secluded grottos on the Appian Way, floated like fragrant odors on the wings of fame. Friend told them to friend in the Forum and at the baths; they found their way into the Pretorian camp. Nemesius heard a veteran soldier tell another how he had seen a person miraculously cured. He thought of his own poor, sightless child, and a joyful hope he had never felt before stirred his heart. By means of some Catholic soldiers he made his way to the Catacombs where St. Stephen resided. It would be easy to imagine his impressions as he passed along those dark, gloomy passages. The strange images on the walls; the little chapels lit up for the singing of the divine praises or the celebration of the Holy Mysteries; and the

tombs of the dead, whose rudely-sculptured slabs told the sleep of peace:

“ That e'en these bones from insult should protect  
Some frail memorial is erected nigh,  
With uncouth rhymes and shapeless sculpture  
decked,  
Implores the passing tribute of a sigh ”—

all inspired a feeling of awe. Death in the onslaught of the battle has no terrors for the brave; but when viewed in its sepulchre, it has a thrill for the stoutest heart. Nemesius, who instinctively held one hand on his sword and in the other his helmet with nodding plumes, may have thought he was descending, like Æneas, to the Avernus of Pluto, or about to be initiated into the terrors of the mysteries of Greece.

Whilst wrapt in thought, following his guide, and wondering how this strange adventure would end, he suddenly enters into the presence of Stephen. In those days of triumph for the Church the very appearance of the Christian saints converted the pagan heart. God gave them a halo of sanctity, an aureola of virtue, that no brush could paint,

no pen could describe. The haughty colonel, who never before respected a fellow-creature, found himself on his knees before the venerable king of the Catacombs. When the soft and amiable voice of the pastor bade him rise and gave him courage, he pleaded with eloquence and tears that a participation of the blessings scattered on the suffering poor might be even purchased for his sightless child. The miracle is registered in heaven, and the holy Pope knows it. He bade the colonel bring the child next day, and she should be cured.

Never did parent hurry home with some welcome present for a darling child more self-satisfied than the brave Nemesius. The moment he entered his house he embraced his Lucilla—a little girl of ten years of age—with tears and kisses, and with prophetic joy announced to her on the morrow she would see the sun. He made a vow in his heart—it passed from his lips, and from his lips to heaven, where it was accepted—that if Lucilla got her sight, he would worship only the God who granted the favor.

The next morning the “little spark,” as her name expresses, was baptized by the aged Pontiff. During the ceremony she saw a beautiful boy, shining in light, come towards her and touch her eyes, expressing how the mystery of baptism brought first the light of faith into her soul, then the light of the world on her eyes. She stood in amazement, and for a few moments could not repress her exclamations of joy and surprise. What must be the first look on the world for those born blind! We cease to appreciate what we see often; but here all the impressions that have been gathering on us from childhood, all that is bright and beautiful in the world around us, pour into the startled soul like the sudden burst of the sunlight on the darkened eye.

Nemesius, the father, is baptized a few days after. With all the bravery of his profession he girds on his spiritual armor, and rushes into the midst of the battle against the powers of hell. So great is his fervor and bravery that he was promoted at once to a higher position in the

little camp of the Church; for Pope Stephen ordained him a deacon.

How different the warfare! From the pride of military pomp, the high-sounding titles, the obsequious legions in plated armor, the neighing war-steed tearing the earth with impatience—all changed in a few hours to the holy mysteries in the Catacombs, the instruction of neophytes, and bending with consolation over the bedside of the dying. The change that passed over the destinies of Nemesius was like that of Paul on the road to Damascus. It was the miracle of grace that nerved his heart to say:

“ Farewell to the plumed troop and the big wars  
That make ambition virtue;  
Farewell the neighing steed and shrill trump,  
The spirit-stirring drum, the ear-piercing fife,  
The royal banner, and all quality,  
Pride, pomp, and circumstance of glorious war ! ”

The conversion of this great man soon reached the ears of the persecutors of the Church. The consuls Maximus and Galerius were to find him, and to put him to death at the moment and place discov-

ered. One evening Nemesius was returning to the Catacombs. He had been the messenger of consolation to some invalid in the city. On reaching the Temple of Mars he found Galerius, Maximus, and others were engaged in offering their impure rites to the marble statue of the god. He could not bear the imposture; and he knelt on the road outside the temple and prayed God would let them know that they were worshipping devils. Immediately Maximus, an unfeeling and hardened persecutor of the Christians, was possessed by the evil spirit, and he cried out in a loud voice: "The prayers of Nemesius are burning me."

Having been informed that Nemesius was outside the temple, they rushed out to seize him; but they had scarcely laid hands on him when from Maximus there came a scream such as is only heard in the dungeons of hell. He was lifted several feet in the air, and then hurled to the ground; his corpse fell on the marble pavement.

Nemesius was cast into the Mamertine, and his little girl was handed over to an

impious, immoral woman named Maxima, who was to use every means in her power to corrupt the child's mind and force her to sacrifice to the senseless idols. Deep down in his gloomy and horrible prison Nemesius thought more of his little treasure than his own privations. Anxious fancy suggested all kinds of afflicting thoughts—the ill-treatment they would give the child; the horrible suggestions they would make to her; and, O crushing thought! they may succeed in ruining the innocence of the little angel given to him by God. Never did more fervent prayer pass through the rocks of the Mamertine, or fly with more intensity to the throne of God. Never did prayer receive a more perfect answer. Nemesius wept in his resignation to the will of God, and Lucilla was saved—the angels were preparing the double crown of virginity and martyrdom for the favorite child.

Yet the sad fears of Nemesius were not without foundation. Lucilla suffered much in the hands of the cruel and depraved wretch that had undertaken to destroy her. The tears and touching entreaties of

the child were unheeded; at one time shut up in a dark room and left without food, at another stript of her beautiful dress and covered with a piece of sackcloth, and made to work with the slaves; and everything that could wound or horrify the sensitive heart of childhood was tried in vain on the brave little Christian. Her persecutors saw something so heavenly and so amiable in Lucilla that they began to feel ashamed of their cruelty and depravity. When called to meet her father, she had insensibly spread the influence of Christianity, like the odor of a beautiful flower, that gives fragrance to every breeze that passes. It is example, even in a child, not deep theological discourses, that produces the greatest fruit.

Lucilla is once more in the arms of her father. She is brought to meet him when on the way to the tribunal of the pagan judge. Their greeting was long and affectionate; the father, who knew what was coming, could not speak for his tears—the natural outburst of paternal affection, which can exist with the detachment of martyrdom; whilst Lucilla, hanging from

his neck, begged and prayed he would save her from that wicked woman. Few the words that passed between them; they tore the heart of the noble father, who felt a greater sacrifice in offering to God the rising impulses of revenge than the shedding of his own and his daughter's blood. Delighted with the constancy of his child, and filled with the blissful anticipations of eternal union which martyrdom would bring him—union with God in his happy kingdom, and union with the object of his earthly affections; for those that truly love know the joy that lives in this hope—he appeared undaunted before the tribunal of Valerian, leading by the hand the charming little Lucilla, who had now dried her tears, and showed her father she was not afraid.

Valerian was seated on a throne in the Temple of the Earth, surrounded with soldiers, lictors, and the priests of the idol. A gloomy silence reigned around. Nemesius was led in. He was dressed in the military peace toga, and had abandoned the emblems of his earthly warfare for the graver habiliments of his Christian pro-

fession. He was in the bloom of his manhood, handsome and brave, and much loved by his companions in arms, many of whom had come from the camp to be present at his trial, and evinced the deepest sympathy for their brave colonel and his lovely child. Silence was commanded, and all eyes were turned towards the Christians.

‘Nemesius, where is that prudence we have heretofore found in you, always so illustrious in word and deed? Do you not think but we know what is good for you, and will recommend it to you? We advise you not to abandon the worship of the gods you have followed from your childhood.’

Thus spoke the judge with all the solemnity he could command. It is a strange fact that even pagans, far away in the second and third centuries, claimed for the worship of idols of wood and stone the senseless argument of the propriety or necessity of remaining in the religion you were brought up in.

Nemesius scarcely heeded the silly judge; his thoughts were fixed on the is-

sues of his refusal to sacrifice. The fervor of his spirit effervesced; nature assumed her reign over his feelings. Tears involuntarily starting to his eyes, he majestically replied:\*

“Unhappy, sinful man I have been! I have rejected truth; I have shed innocent blood; burdened and crushed with guilt, I have found the mercy of the great and only ruler, Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Although late in the evening of life, I know Him now who redeemed me with his blood; who gave sight to my girl, whose cure baffled all the skill of doctors; who illumined, too, the eyes of our hearts, that, despising the blindness of idolatrous superstition, we might be converted to the light of Christianity. Him I fear, and him only will I adore; to him I offer the poor service of my worship. I reject idols of stone and bronze, which I know to be devils that seek our ruin, and wish to drag us with them to the woes of eternal death.”

Valerian said: “I know the charm of

\* “Et respondit cum lacrimis.”—*Acts.*

your magic verses, by which you even effect homicide; for it was thus you killed Maximus, that you might escape yourselves. Moreover, you wish to try your dark arts against ourselves and the safety of the state."

He then asked once more would they sacrifice; but receiving again the stern refusal of the brave Nemesius, after a moment's pause, in the midst of a death-like stillness, he pronounced sentence. They should be brought to the Temple of Mars, on the Appian Way; there the little virgin Lucilla should be put to death before her father's eyes, that, perhaps, seeing his child about to be executed, he may consent to sacrifice.

The scene at the Temple of Mars was one not easily forgotten; terrible to the spectators who viewed it, and thrilling to us who read of it seventeen centuries afterwards. The atrium of the temple was crowded. Many of the people were in tears when they saw them making preparations to execute the sweet little child. She looked so beautiful; the charm of childish innocence cast a halo of angelic

sweetness around her. We fancy we see the dear child shudder and draw nearer to her father, as she looks on the coarse, rough soldiers with the axe that was to cut off her head. How tell of the last embrace and the encouraging words of the broken-hearted father?

“ His face still combating with tears and smiles,  
The badges of his grief and patience,  
That, had not God for some strong purpose steeled  
The hearts of men, they must perforce have melted,  
And barbarism itself have pitied him.”

Here he proved himself braver than in the terrors of battle. He cut with his own hand the golden ringlets that fell on the snowy neck of Lucilla, that the axe might have full play. He bound her eyes with a handkerchief, and, holding her soft little hand in his, he bade her repeat the holy name of Jesus. The executioner, who was unnerved for a moment, drew back, and refused to strike the tender flower; but terrified by the rough command of the captain, he advanced, the burnished steel flashed above the child’s head, and another moment was crimson with the pure, ruddy stream of innocent blood. O consolation

of faith ! Lucilla was that moment with the angels, bright and beautiful, singing the praises of God.\*

Nemesius soon followed. The sapling was cut down ; the oak was now to be felled. He bent his neck to the axe, that was still reeking with the life-stream of his innocent child, and, repeating the sweet name that gave strength to Lucilla, he passed away from the sorrows of life to the sunshine of a blissful eternity

\* "Lucillam filiam ante patris decollatam fecit gladio jugulari in via Appia ante Templum Martis."—*Acta S. Stephani, Bollandists, Aug. 2.*





## CHAPTER XIII.

TERTULLIANUS.

(August 4, 256.)

**T**F the veneration that Catholics have for the relics of the sainted dead were not prescribed in the teaching of the Church, the doctrine would be forced on us by the extraordinary miracles and graces conferred through these relics. The brute creation and the elements have been forced to respect them. What martyr's body that was exposed on open plains to be devoured by birds, or on the roadsides to be the food of dogs, was ever touched? They floated in luminous clouds on the rivers, like the body of St. John Nepomucene, or were discovered by visions, like the bodies of Sebastian, Cecilia, Zoa, and an innumerable number of others, now honorably placed under the altars of our

churches. The lightning of heaven fell on those who ill-treated the bodies of the saints, and often the great gifts of faith, of repentance, even martyrdom itself, was the reward from God to souls buried in the darkness of paganism for their respect shown to the relics of his servants. "Go," said a wealthy Roman lady to a youthful knight, to whom she bore a too human love—"go, seek for the bodies of the holy martyrs of our faith, that, while we honor their remains, they may intercede with God for us, who are such great sinners. I have been told that in Cilicia there is a president no less avaricious than cruel, who makes a horrible butchery of the martyrs, then sells their bodies at a high price to the Christians. Take with you money to purchase from Simplician those glorious remains, as also sufficient to enable you to perform good works on the way. Here are shrouds of the fine linen of Egypt, as also balm, myrrh, nard, and other perfumes to embalm these sacred relics. A suitable number of domestics and horses shall accompany you."

The young and handsome Roman

citizen, cradled in the delights of patrician luxury, laid aside his crown of myrtle and roses, remembered not the joys of banquets, but sought in tears and repentance to make himself worthy of the noble commission entrusted to him. Wondering how one so sinful could be intrusted with a commission so holy, he arrived at Tarsis as the impious judge was torturing twenty-one Christians. Sending his servants, with horses and equipage, to the inn, he hastened to the scene of bloodshed. In travelling costume, in riding-boots, and whip in hand, he passed through the crowd, embraced the martyrs, kissed their wounds, and encouraged them to persevere. The noble knight was the first of the number to pass to the imperishable crown of glory. His servants purchased the remains the next day for five hundred crowns of gold. The penitent Aglæ, informed by an angel, met his precious relics on the Appian Way, and placed them in the church she built on the Aventine, which still bears the name of Boniface.\*

\* This church is better known as St. Alexis.

Thus God rewards the least act of favor conferred on those he loves; and similar was the blessing given to Tertullianus, a pagan who, as we read in the Acts of Pope Stephen, buried, through sympathy, the bodies of the martyrs. But we must briefly recall one or two events from the Acts, so as to understand more clearly the interesting facts we have to record connected with the Mamertine.

After the death of Nemesius and his lovely child his steward, named Symphronius, was brought before Olympius, a tribune deputed by Valerian to torture him and obtain from him, if possible, the treasures of Nemesius. "If you seek from me," bravely replied Symphronius to the avaricious demands of the tribune, "the riches of my master Nemesius, you will not get them; for they are already distributed amongst the poor. If you wish me to sacrifice, I will sacrifice, but to our Lord Jesus Christ." He was stretched on the rack and beaten. Olympius had a golden statue of Mars brought before him, in the hope that in the agony of pain he would consent to sacrifice; but the martyr,

beholding it, said: "May Jesus, the Son of the living God, destroy thee!" The golden idol melted. The tribune, struck with wonder, ordered the lictors to cease torturing him and bring him to his own house, saying, "I will try every species of torture on you to-night." The fact was, he was terrified. The power that melted the golden statue could equally cast the frail frame of man to the earth, and cause it to perish. He handed Symphronius to Tertullianus, his major-domo, with the injunction to treat him kindly. In the meantime he hastened to his wife to tell her what had happened and his own fears. Exuperia was not blinded by the awful cloud that hung over his pagan heart, and, moved by the holy promptings of divine grace, said to her husband: "If such be the power of Christ, why do we not abandon those false gods that cannot help us or themselves? Let us go to that holy man who gave sight to the little daughter of Nemesius." The tribune, who had known Nemesius and sighed over the untimely end of that brave soldier, had already resolved in his heart to become Christian.

That night the household gods, sacred to the memories of every pagan hearth, were smashed to pieces in the palatial residence of Olympius. His wife and son were baptized with him; and the holy Pope Stephen instructed them and gave them Holy Communion.

These extraordinary conversions came to the ear of Valerian, and, in his wrath, fanned again the fire of persecution and made it blaze with fresh fury. Olympius and family and Symphronius were brought in ropes and chains to the Temple of the Earth, where Valerian wished to vent his impotent rage on the martyrs before he would give them their crown. They were burned at the statue of the sun alongside the Coliseum. Their bodies were taken away privately at night by Pope Stephen and his deacons, and buried on the Latin Way.

Fresh edicts were placed in all the public parts of the city, and a reward offered to any one who would bring the Christians to trial. In the search for Pope Stephen twelve priests were seized and put to death near the aqueduct on the Latin

Way. It is in the midst of these scenes we find Tertullianus appearing, like another Tobias, to inter the bodies of the martyrs. Although he was aware of the conversion and death of his master Olympius, he was not yet baptized. Still a pagan, his heart was shocked with the cruelties of the persecutors; and in deep sympathy he followed the heroes of the cross, saw their execution, and at night brought them with his own hands to the entrance of the Catacombs, and there waited till some Christians came who would receive and place them in their honorable sepulchres.

The noble conduct of Tertullianus was reported to Pope Stephen. He sent for the young man, and in a few days ordained him a priest, giving him a special injunction to persevere in the holy work of burying the bodies of the martyrs. Whilst fearlessly discharging the duties imposed on him he was seized and brought before a prefect named Mark, and by him to Valerian. The usual foolish questions and fearless answers were passed, and the usual thrilling scene of torture which constituted the vigil of martyrdom. Valerian finding

his efforts fail to extort from the young priest either the treasures of his earthly master or the denial of his heavenly Master, he handed him over to a tyrannical prefect named Sapricius. This dignitary, perhaps to shroud his tribunal with the terrors of the dungeon beneath, held his court of judgment in the Mamertine prison.\* Proud of the privilege of shedding Christian blood, this prefect had Tertullianus led around the Forum in chains, and a crier going before him announcing that he was a Christian. Intended to strike terror into the people, it was the arrangement of divine Providence, that they might see and know the conversion and triumph of those who, a short time before, were pagans like themselves. "Words sound, but example thunders."

Brought into the Mamertine, Sapricius haughtily said, "Give your name!"

"Sinner!" replied Tertullianus, "and a servant of the servants of Christ."

"Are you a slave or free?"

\* "Statim Sapricius prefectus tribunal sibi præparari fecit in loco qui dicitur Privata Mamertini."—*Acts S. Stephani*, No. 16.

"The devil has so blinded your heart that you don't understand what I say. I told you I was the servant of the servants of Jesus Christ."

"Sacrifice!" thundered the irate prefect. "Give up the treasures of Olympius, and enjoy life."

"If you knew what eternal life meant," replied Tertullianus mildly, "you would not value the present life, which for the worshippers of demons will be changed into an eternal conflagration."

The prefect ordered his mouth to be beaten with stones.

The holy martyr, unmoved, replied: "You order my mouth to be struck, but He who reigns above will strike you and the demons, who are the inventors of the follies of paganism."

He is stretched on the rack and beaten. During those excruciating tortures he poured forth this beautiful prayer: "O Lord Jesus Christ! do not abandon the most unworthy of thy servants, confessing thy glory. Give me strength to persevere in unvarying confidence, that I may deliver to thy hands this soul which thou

hast redeemed with thy blood, and mercifully drawn from the darkness of ignorance and the worship of idols."

In the meantime Saprius sent word to Valerian that he could not succeed in getting anything from Tertullianus the Christian, neither sacrifice nor gold, and word was brought back to have him beheaded. He was taken to the second milestone on the Latin Way; and, strange to say, on the very spot where he stood a few days before to gaze in deep sympathy on the martyrdom of twelve brave priests he himself gained the crown of a priest and martyr—a title that constitutes the brightest sun of the eternal kingdom of God.

The aged Stephen wept when he heard of the noble end of his neophyte priest, and with his own hands placed his relics along with the other twelve, where a rude sepulchral slab tells "they sleep in peace."





## CHAPTER XIV.

ABUNDIUS AND ABUNDANTIUS.

### I.

**A**T the time that Diocletian and his impious associate in the empire, Galerius, were preparing the edicts for the persecution of the Christians, the pagan priests at Rome, who knew their hour was coming, were preparing to give the edicts the full force of their terrors the moment the storm-cloud would burst in the East. The houses of the noted Christians, the places of assembly, and special victims of their hatred or fear, were all marked in their tablets with the sign of blood. In the impatience of persons famishing with hunger, waiting to be called to a banquet, those representatives of the powers of

darkness longed to satiate in torture the hatred they bore the Christian name. Because Diocletian delayed the persecution, they sent a representative from Rome to urge on the piety of the emperor his duty towards the gods, and extend the proposed edict to the city. According to the Acts of Abundius and Abundantius, a lawyer stood before the emperor and said to him: "I suggest to your piety that you order those concealed in the city be sought, who are the authors of this sect and seduce the people from the temples of the gods; let them be seized and end their lives by divers torments, or offer incense and sacrifice to the omnipotent gods." The zeal and deputation of the pagan priests had been anticipated; the messenger of evil had already winged its way to the capital; the blood of the martyrs had commenced to flow; and angels were preparing crowns of glory for the triumphant children of the cross.

Amongst the houses where the Christians gathered, and marked by the pagans, there was one in the street called Lanarius, and belonging to a pious matron

named Theodora. At a moment when some pious souls were gathered together in this house, perhaps to assist at the celebration of the Holy Mysteries or receive pious instruction from the good priest Abundius, the soldiers surrounded the house and seized the Christians, who were twenty-five in number. Amongst them were the brothers Abundius the priest, and Abundantius, a deacon, who were immediately put into chains and brought before the representatives of the emperor. As they were not only the leaders of this noble band of Christians, but were themselves of noble birth and family, on them fell the weight of the tyrant's wrath. Whilst their companions were sent to their crown at once, Abundius and Abundantius were reserved for greater trials, to give greater glory to God. They were bound in chains and cast into the Mamertine, where they were kept for thirty days. After many tortures they found their crown at one of the milestones outside of the city. Let us follow the events of their passion, which are given simply and briefly in their Acts.

"Brought before Hercules, the prefect, he said: "Whence come you, and of what religion are you?"

Abundius, replying, said. "The men whom you see here are Christians, and their names are written in heaven."

Then the prefect said: "I see you seduce them, that they may not sacrifice to the gods."

But they, as if with one voice, said: "Never may it be that we shall sacrifice to the demons whom you worship. We offer the sacrifice of pious devotion to our Lord Jesus Christ in the odor of sweetness."

Hercules, the judge, said to Abundius: "How are you called?"

He answered: "My first and spiritual name is Christian, and I am called a priest; my name in the flesh is Abundius, and I am a servant of our Lord Jesus Christ. But do not think that those who are here with me will ever consent to recognize your gods."

Then Abundantius the deacon said: "Do you think that we adore deaf and dumb idols, without sense, without power? We turn towards Him who alone is worthy

of adoration, who made heaven and earth and everything that is."

The prefect then said: "Who is he, and what did he do?"

Abundantius replied and said: "God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who made heaven and earth and everything that is in them; but your idols, which are made of wood and stone, will perish in an everlasting fire, together with those who worship them."

The judge then said: "Will you sacrifice to the god Hercules, and depart untouched?"

But they said: "We will never sacrifice to your devils."

Then the judge ordered Abundius the priest and Abundantius the deacon to be cast into the Mamertine prison, and the other twenty-three to be brought outside the walls of the city and be beheaded, which sentence was carried out on the nones of August. Their bodies were collected by John the priest and Theodora the matron, and buried in the crypt at the Clivum Cucumeris.

Then the matron Theodora went to the

prison to see Abundius and Abundantius, and relate to them how bravely the martyrs suffered, and how the blessed priest John gathered together their bodies, and binding them with aromatic wrappings, buried them in the crypt on the same road where they entered in peace into the mysteries of Christ.

After thirty days the judge ordered the saints of God to be brought from prison and presented to him in the Forum, near the Temple of the Earth; and they were brought before him, bound with chains. Then he said to them: "What are you doing for your safety? Give up this pertinacity, and trust not in magic arts, lest you perish like those with whom you have been tried."

The saints replied: "They have not perished, but are in glory now with Christ."

A certain lawyer present then said to the judge: "Unless these are put to death, there will no longer be any fear in the people."

Then the judge ordered them to be stretched on the rack and tortured, and

during their suffering they said: "Glory be to our Lord Jesus Christ."

Then the judge said: "Still you name Christ. Now I will destroy this pertinacity by the power of the great Hercules."

He ordered them to be brought to the fourteenth milestone on the Flaminian Way, and be beheaded.

Whilst they were being led forth, bound with chains, and when they arrived at the city of Lubras, there came to them a celebrated man named Marcian, who, weeping, said to them, "Alas! I have lost my son."

The blessed Abundius said: "And who has taken thy son from thee?"

Marcian replied, "He is dead."

Immediately the holy martyrs said: "Hasten, bring him here, and you will see the goodness of our Lord Jesus Christ."

When he had gone to bring his son, the ministers of the devil would not wait, but brought the martyrs to the place of execution. But when they arrived there, behold Marcian, having run with the

greatest speed he was able, came up in time, bearing his dead child in his arms, and laid him at the feet of the holy martyrs, and almost out of breath, but with much ardor, said: "I conjure you by Him for whom you suffer that you will obtain for me that I may come to my crown with you after the resurrection of my son."

Then the people who had gathered around wondered if they would be able to raise the son to life. They cast themselves on the earth, and with tears prayed to the Lord, saying: "O Lord Jesus Christ! who didst deign to raise Lazarus, after four days' corruption, from the tomb, deign now to send an angel to recall the spirit to this inanimate body, that all may know that you are the Son of God, who hast come to save this world, who livest and reignest through all ages."

Rising from his prayer, Saint Abundius said to the corpse: "I say to thee, dry earth, arise in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, in whose name the dead rise and live for ever with him." And immediately the child's eyes were opened and he arose.

Then, Marcian bringing a vessel of water, Abundius baptized him, together with his son whom he had called back to life, in the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Ghost; after which the executioners seized Marcian and his son, and, whilst they all knelt and gave thanks to God, the soldiers cut off their heads, on the sixteenth kalends of October. The same night Theodora came with her sons and secured the bodies of the martyrs, and brought them to her own farm, twenty-eight miles from the city, and there, casting balms around them, she buried them in peace."

## II.

The fame of those martyrs was greater in the early ages than at present. A church was erected to their honor in the vineyard of Theodora, where she herself, a short time afterwards, was laid in similar honor, bearing on her tomb the simplest but most eloquent epitaph that could tell to passing generations the history of the dead — the crown and the

palm. There is an extraordinary account given of another church erected to commemorate those saints by Pepin, the son of Charlemagne. This prince was on his way to Rome, and, arriving at Sienna, he was much moved by the fame of these great martyrs, and determined to build a church under their invocation. Having selected a site on the public road near the city and at the foot of the hill, he commenced the foundation. The next day, however, not a trace of the work done the day before could be found. The grass grew as if not a sod had been turned. But high up, near the summit of the mountain, was found an exact appearance of the work performed in the valley. The good prince took the hint that the saints wished their temple to be erected in that spot, and with great devotion and magnanimity erected a splendid church away upon the mountain, which is now called Sant Abondio. To the church he added a spacious convent, which he gave to the religious sisters of St. Benedict; and for many centuries this convent flourished with great sanctity.

In the year 1000 the relics of these martyrs were translated from the church in the vineyard of St. Theodora. Some events that passed on this occasion are extremely interesting.

Otho III., having built the Church of St. Adalbert, now St. Bartholomew, in the island of the Tiber, wished to enrich it with all the valuable relics he could gather. Having learned there were a great many holy relics in the Church of St. Abundius and St. Abundantius, which stood at the base of Mons Soracte, he sent his servants to bring those relics to Rome. They found in one tomb the bodies of these holy martyrs, and near, in a separate monument, the relics of St. Theodora, besides several other holy martyrs, who were wrapped in vestments of gold, and slept in sumptuous monuments, their names unknown, all which they brought to Rome.

After those holy relics were taken away, the bishop who ruled the church in this country, by name Crescentianus, wept with grief, and came to the sepulchre to see if any relics might have been left to console

him. He ordered excavations to be made deeper into the sepulchre, and there, to his joy, he found the bodies of Marcian and John his son, who were baptized under such extraordinary circumstances by the holy priest Abundius. He collected the relics, and summoned all his priests around him, in order to bring his treasures with becoming pomp and devotion to his cathedral church in Castellana. Whilst the procession was passing the Church of St. Eustachius an image of St. Theodora, placed in the church, commenced visibly to weep, by which miracle it was believed Almighty God wished to show his displeasure and that of his holy servants at the desecration and removal of these holy relics from the villa of the blessed Theodora. The relics were, however, brought to the Church of St. Hippolytus, and here another extraordinary miracle took place. There were on the altars some faded lilies and other flowers, which were quite dried up; but the moment the relics were brought into the church these flowers bloomed afresh, as if just culled in the garden, and sent forth a delicious fragrance. Which

fact the bishop and priests and the whole city testified to have seen.

The next day the relics were removed to the Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary. It was raining the whole night, and just before the procession started it was pouring drenching torrents, so that many wished to postpone the ceremony; but the bishop was inflexible, and, as if inspired by God to give occasion for another marvellous interposition of those holy saints, the moment they left the church the rain ceased, the clouds opened above them, and, although the rain fell in torrents on every side of them, not a drop fell on those employed in the procession. In the Church of the Blessed Virgin other very extraordinary miracles took place. A little girl, who was wasting away with some unknown complaint, and was reduced to a skeleton, was instantly cured when brought in presence of the relics.

The bodies of SS. Abundius and Abundantius underwent several translations after this. The antipope Anacletus had them removed to the Church of SS. Cosmas and Damian, over which church he

was the cardinal titular; and then again they were removed with immense solemnity, in the year 1584, and placed under the high altar of the Gesù. The crowds that showed their devotion to the holy martyrs on this occasion were so great that the immense church of the Gesù could not hold the half of them. A portion of these relics were sent to St. Francis Xavier in Japan, where that apostle taught his neophytes to love and reverence the great martyrs of the Church, whose example and fortitude in suffering for the faith would encourage them in the trials they would soon have to suffer for the same faith.





## CHAPTER XV.

THE COMPANIONS OF POPE STEPHEN AND  
THE CHURCH OF ST. AGATHA.

### I.

**N**EARLY all the martyrs that glorified God in the arena of the Coliseum sanctified by their presence the dungeons of the Mamertine. In the Acts of Pope Stephen, which we have given in their original, we have record of a whole family cast into the Mamertine and afterwards executed at the "Accursed Stone." Their relics are preserved under the high altar of the Church of St. Agatha. Around this venerable little church, now the collegiate church of the Irish College at Rome, there hang some thrilling historical reminiscences, which we will make the subject of this chapter.

Some of its oldest traditions bring us

back to the time of Julius Cæsar. It is said that on the spot where now stands the Church of St. Agatha this lion of Roman history had a magnificent mansion. It was at that time outside the walls of the city; hence the district around is, to this day, called Suburra, a corruption of the word *suburbia*.

This portion of the Quirinal had also the name of the "Marble Horse," from an immense equestrian statue in marble erected before the residence of Cæsar.\*

In the next century after Julius Cæsar we find there was here a temple to the god Silvanus †—a god of Grecian origin, supposed to dwell in groves and to be the protector of cattle, sheep, etc. Amongst the ridiculous fables of mythology, the cypress-tree is supposed to have been made by this god. There was a beautiful boy, named Cyparissus, much loved by Silvanus, who one day accidentally killed a favorite stag. Cyparissus was much fretted, and was pining away, when Silvanus seeing him so much afflicted, and wishing to

\* Marliani, lib. iii. ch. vii.

† Faustus, lib. iv. ch. xvii.

have him near himself, turned him into this beautiful tree.

Two centuries rolled over, and the demons who rejoiced in the absurdities of paganism still reigned in this spot. But as soon as the storms of persecution had subsided, and Sylvester and Constantine were erecting Christian monuments through the city, the temple was turned into a church and dedicated to the renowned Sicilian virgin and martyr, Agatha. Before acquainting the reader how this temple became dedicated to St. Agatha, we must recall an extraordinary historical fact, beautifully expressed in verse by the gifted Cowper:

“ There was a time when Etna’s silent fire  
Slept unperceived, the mountain yet entire ;  
When, conscious of no danger from below,  
She towered a cloud-capped pyramid of snow ;  
No thunder shook with deep, intestine sound  
The blooming groves that girdled her around ;  
Her unctuous olives and her purple vines  
Unfelt the fury of those bursting mines,  
The peasant’s hopes, and, not in vain assured,  
In peace upon her sloping sides matured ;  
When, on a day like that of the last doom,  
A conflagration laboring in her womb,  
She teemed and heaved with an infernal birth

That shook the circling seas and solid earth.  
Dark and voluminous the vapors rise  
And hang their horrors in the neighboring skies ;  
While through the Stygian veil that blots the day  
In dazzling streaks the vivid lightnings play.  
But, oh ! what muse, and in what powers of song,  
Can trace the torrent as it burns along,  
Havoc and devastation in the van ?  
It marches o'er the prostrate works of man ;  
Vines, olives, herbage, forests, disappear,  
And all the charms of a Sicilian year.”

It was during the first and probably the most terrible eruption of this mountain that the city of Catania was saved by a veil taken from the tomb of St. Agatha. This eruption took place in 354, the anniversary of the martyrdom of St. Agatha. The molten lava was pouring down the mountain-side in destructive fury, and threatened the beautiful city with ruin. In their consternation the Christians had recourse to their beloved patron, and carried a veil from the sepulchre in procession towards the mountain. The pagans joined in this procession; for they had already a secret reverence, on account of her miracles. Like the volcano itself, this devotion burst forth suddenly, and in the moment of danger showed itself fearlessly.

The city was saved and converted. History records that four times the city of Catania was thus protected from what seemed inevitable ruin. The fame of the Sicilian thaumaturga, the devotion and love of the people for this favorite spouse of God, were wafted on the cheerful breezes to Rome and the Christian world. The martyrs are not the property of the hamlet or town where they suffered: they are the glory of the Church; hence devotion to St. Agatha was as strong in Rome as in Sicily. Pope Sylvester received some of her precious relics, and, looking around for a spot to raise a church in her honor, selected the ruins of the Temple of Silvanus, on the slopes of the Quirinal, and thus commenced the beautiful and artistic Church of St. Agatha in Suburra.\*

That this church is one of the most ancient in Rome, and probably erected in the time of Constantine (as asserted by Panciroli), may be easily surmised from the fact that it was in a ruinous condition in the year 472, when Ricimer, a Goth and an Arian, rebuilt it in consequence of a

\* Panciroli, "Tesori Nascoste," p. 272.

vow he made in the midst of crimes and bloodshed. This appears from an ancient inscription which, up to the time of Cardinal Frederick Borromeo (1586), was preserved in the tribune of the church. It runs thus: "TL. RICIMER V. I. MAGISTER UTRIUSQUE MILITIAE PATRICIUS ET EXCONS. ORD. PRO VOTO SUO ADORNAVIT."

When, some years afterwards, the Goths took possession of Rome, the Arian priests demanded this church. They retained possession of it for several centuries, until at length the Goths were finally banished, and Arianism, like a rotten branch, fell from the live tree, and, like the burnt wood, was forgotten. Gregory I. appointed a man named Leone to restore this church, so long desecrated, and he himself consecrated it in the following year (593); a description of which he gives us in his "Dialogues" (lib. iii. book xxx.)

During the celebration of the divine mysteries by the Holy Father all that were present heard the screams of a pig, and many felt the animal passing through their legs; but no one saw it. On the following night a frightful noise was heard on

the roof—screams, yells, and the rattling of tiles—as if the whole fabric would collapse in ruin at any moment. Thus the demons were permitted to express their regret in being banished from their temple, where they had reigned so long to the ruin of souls and insult to God. On the other hand, the angels were permitted to manifest their joy and their presence inside the church. A beautiful, luminous cloud hung for several days over the high altar, and the church was filled with the most delicious perfume. After the functions the sacristan extinguished the lights, when they were suddenly lit again by some invisible hand, showing, as Gregory suggests, that the light of faith now cast its saving rays, like the sun, on a place buried in the dark night of heresy and unbelief.\*

\* “Et præ ejusdem loci angustia populi se turba comprimeret, quidam ex his qui extra sacrarium stabant porcum subito intra suos pedes huc illucque discurrere senserunt ; . . . sed videri a nullo potuit quamvis sentiri potuisset.

“ . . . Peracta igitur celebratione Missarum recessimus ; sed adhuc nocte eadem magnus in ejusdem ecclesiæ tectis strepitus factus est ac si in eis aliquis errando discurreret ; . . . tanto terrore insonuit ac si omnis illa ecclesia a fundamentis fuisse aversa. . . . Super altare ejusdem ecclesiæ nubes cœlitus descendit suoque illud velamine operuit, om

These strange events were represented in fresco on the walls of the church, but, as they became faded, in six hundred years afterwards they were completely destroyed by Cardinal Gozzadini in the year 1622. It is probable that this church was also dedicated to St. Sebastian. The relics of that saint were brought with those of St. Agatha. Such was the custom of this Pontiff; and the city of Rome was preserved at that time from a pestilence by St. Sebastian, in testimony of which the people erected in his honor the altar in St. Peter in Vincoli.\*

Secular priests were in charge of the church up to the end of the eighth century. It was then, in the year 795, given by Leo III. to the Benedictine monks of Monte Casino. Its superior was one of

nemque ecclesiam tanto terrore ac suavitatis odore replevit  
ut patentibus januis nullus illic præsumeret intrare.

"Post paucos iterum dies cum expletis Missarum solemnibus extinctis lampadibus custos ex eadem ecclesia egressus fuisse, post paululum intravit et lampades quas extinctas reliquerat lucentes reperit . . . ut aperte ea ipso lumine claresceret quia locus ille a tenebris ad lucem venisset."—*Dialogues*, book iii. chap. xxx.

\* "Storia della Diaconia di S. Agatha in Suburra," Giovanni Laurenti.

the twenty privileged abbots of Rome who assisted the Holy Father when officiating solemnly at St. John Lateran's. The church and monastery is generally called, from this period, St. Agatha in Monasterio. Towards the end of the twelfth century it was taken from the Benedictines (1198), in punishment, probably, of their having supported the cause of the antipope Victor IV.; and from the hands of secular priests it passed, in the thirteenth century, to the Congregation of the Humiliati, a religious order strange in its origin and stranger still in its suppression. It took its origin from some Milanese prisoners brought to Germany by Frederick I., better known as Frederick Barbarossa (Redbeard). Wearied with their exile and longing to return to their native land, a number of them sued for pardon and liberty. It was granted. They were so grateful to God for this favor that they devoted themselves entirely to his holy service; husbands and wives amongst them agreeing to separate and taking vows of chastity. Those who were free worked together at a manufactory of wool. They followed a holy rule in com-

munity life, and were afterwards placed under the rule of St. Benedict, and confirmed by Innocent III. in the year 1200.

The Humiliati in course of time fell from their original fervor, and in the time of St. Charles Borromeo were a source of great disedification to the Church. This holy prelate did all he could to reform them, but his efforts displeased some of their provosts so much that they entered into a conspiracy to murder the archbishop. One of their number was therefore charged with the bloody deed, and this wretch was so desperate that he determined to perish himself in the undertaking. Charles was preserved by a miracle. One evening, when kneeling in his private oratory, reciting the Rosary with the members of his household, the assassin boldly entered the palace, approached the little chapel, and in the midst of the whole household drew from under his cloak a loaded arquebuse and fired at the cardinal. The ball passed the rochet, but no further. The order was immediately suppressed by Pius V. This was in the year 1577. Two years later the church

and monastery were given to the monks of Monte Virgine, founded by William the Abbot. It was Laurenti, one of the superiors of this community, who has written the interesting history of the ancient church up to the year 1797. He relates, besides the facts we have already given, that in ancient times the street now known as Via di S. Agatha in Suburra was called Via Martyrum, or Scala Mortuorum, because the Christians were conducted through this street to the Coliseum or the Pietra Scellerata.\*

In 1594, whilst the monks were carrying the Blessed Sacrament in procession from one gate of the church to the other, there happened to be in the crowd a young Lutheran enthusiast from England. He made a rush at the Blessed Sacrament, and, taking the remonstrance from the priest's hands, flung it violently on the ground. He was immediately seized by an infuriated mob, and, as it transpired that he had already insulted the Catholics several times, he was burnt alive in the Campo di Fiore. He was only thirty years of age. †

\* Page 22.

† Laurenti, page 23.

A study of the ancient inscriptions of this church would well repay the toil they would give. They contribute their quota of curiosities to the Vatican museum. Inside the present choir, and just before the high altar, there is a stone which announces the original was removed to the Vatican museum in 1757. This ancient inscription would seem at first an inexplicable puzzle, but, when discovered, will cause a hearty laugh. It shows that the ancients as well as moderns introduced witticisms into epitaphs of the dead. We give but a feeble idea of the original in the following :

Hic requiescit in pace Domna Bonov.  
Sa qvix ann. XXXXX. et Domo Menna.  
Qvixit mnos . . . (beat anat.  
Ema a Ivda si qvis altervm omine svper  
Me posver anathema abeas da tri.  
Centi de cem et octo patriarche  
Qvichanones esposvervn et da sca xpi  
Pvatvor evangelia.

The meaning is: "Here lies in peace Lady Bonusa, who lived sixty years, and Mr. Menna, who lived . . . years. The curse of Judas on any one who will place another man over me, and may he

have also the curse of the three hundred and eighteen patriarchs who explained the canons, and of the four holy Evangelists of Christ." \*

The relics of the saints Hippolytus, Adrias, Maria, Neone, Paulina, Nominanda, Aurelia, and Martana were brought to this church from the cemetery of St. Callistus during the pontificate of Leo IX., about the year 1150. The wooden case being decayed, they were removed to a marble urn in 1504, with the relics of twenty-three other saints. They were opened again by Cardinal Barberini in 1636, when they were divided as they now stand—that is, under the high altar, the bodies of Hippolytus, Adrias, Mary, and Neone; and under the altar of St. Agatha, Paulina, Aurelia, Martana, and Nominanda.

This church has been enriched by a treasure of indulgences given by several

\* Very interesting and erudite articles have been written on this curious epitaph by Cittadini, "Origine della Lingua," page 82; William Fleetwood, "Inscrip. Ant.," part ii., page 964; Aringhi, "Roma Subterrani," page 138; Martinelli, "Diaconia di S. Agatha," page 14; Ciampini, Gervason, Laurenti, and others. Lady Bonusa and Sig. Menna lived about twelve hundred years ago.

pontiffs. Martinelli relates that he read in a MS. in the Vatican Library that there are 3,000 years for every day in the year. "In Ecclesia S. Agathæ V. et M. omne die sunt anni 3,000 indulgentiarum" (page 76). The statement seems too vague to be authentic. Gregory XIII. granted a plenary indulgence to all who, after due reception of the sacraments of penance and the Blessed Eucharist, will visit this church on the feast of St. Agatha, and pray for the concord of Christian princes, the extirpation of heresies, and the exaltation of the Church.

Clement X., by bull dated December 19, 1671, granted to this church all the privileges already granted to the Benedictine churches, viz., a plenary indulgence on the following days:

St. Maurus, January 10.

St Scholastica, February 10.

St. Benedict, March 21.

SS. Placidus and Companions, October 5.

All the saints of the Benedictine Order, November 13.

The Irish College has only been connected with this church and monastery

since 1837, when, through the energetic management of Cardinal Cullen and the generosity of Gregory XVI., the college was removed from the miserable house in the Via di San Marco. Although there are many interesting particulars connected with the history of the Irish College, it would be foreign to the subject of the present volume; yet we will glance at one fact not generally known, another link between the persecutions of the past and the present, another proof that those loved by God must suffer. We allude to the part this institution took in the suppression of the Jesuits in 1773.

Like the altars that are raised over the tombs of the martyrs, this college is a monument of the dark days of persecution. Its memories are shrouded with the horrors of bloodshed—not through the cruel edicts of Nero, of Decius, or Diocletian, but through the penal laws of Henry, Elizabeth, and Cromwell. There were days when the children of Ireland were dragged before the tribunals of heresy; when her churches and sanctuaries were rifled and desecrated; when she had her

catacombs in the caverns of her mountains, her schools proscribed, and the heads of her priests were sought at the reward of their weight in gold. In the midst of those trials, of dear memory to our faith, a noble and generous Italian prelate opened a refuge for the exiled Levites of the Irish Church.

In the year 1627 Cardinal Ludovico Ludovisi, Archbishop of Bologna, was declared Protector of Ireland. He was determined that this should not be an empty title, as far as he was concerned, in Ireland's dark hour of need. With the assistance of Luke Wadding, the celebrated Irish Franciscan, who had just established the Irish convent at St. Isidore's, the cardinal caused six students to be brought from Ireland and maintained at his own expense. Four were placed in the English College, and two in some other institution. This arrangement was soon found to be imprudent. The difference of character, the national antipathy which has ever marked the history of those two nations, and the awful circumstances of the times, gave little hope of union between those

opposing elements. Although the English and Irish students were both exiles and both persecuted for the same faith, still the good cardinal had to separate them. He accordingly bought a house near St. Isidore's, placed the six students under the care of the Franciscans, and on the 1st of January, 1628, opened the institution which we now know as the Irish College at Rome. The names of the first six students were Eugene Colgan, John St. Laurence, Christopher Chamberlain, Edward Wall, Terence Kelly, John Cruce.

Once set afloat on the sea of life, it had a stormy voyage up to the commencement of this century. Its destinies became wrapped up with the Jesuits, and, although it survived them in 1773, many of our readers will be surprised to hear that it contributed in no small degree to the suppression of that order by Clement XIV.

It is a strange fact that the first brief issued by this Pontiff against the Jesuits was that which removed them from the Irish College. The cry of extermination that was uttered against the Jesuits in all the Catholic countries of Europe found at last

an echo under the shadow of the Vatican itself; the protest of the Irish, though feeble, was more effectual in producing the suppression than the threats of princes or the spoliation of the property of the Holy See, already commenced by France and Naples. It happened thus:

Seven years after its foundation the college was in a flourishing state, but received its first grief in the death of its founder and protector, Cardinal Ludovisi, who died at Bologna in 1632, being only thirty-seven years of age. When his will was opened, it was found he had not forgotten his children from Ireland. He made them a free gift of the house they lived in, an income of a thousand scudi a year (about two hundred pounds), and a large and beautiful villa at Castel Gondolfo. But, what was surprising at the time, he also arranged that the Jesuits should take the administration and care of the college. This seemed remarkable, as no fault could be found with the Franciscan Fathers, the college was flourishing, the students content, and the cardinal himself in his lifetime showed no sign of disapprobation.

To give the history of the college under the Jesuits, up to the time of their banishment from it, would be to rake up many a sad scene of misrepresentation, calumny, and discontent. There was a terrible decree written in heaven. It was an answer to the prayer of the wounded soldier of Pampeluna. All the efforts of the fathers to promote the welfare of the students were abortive, and produced the contrary effect. Imprudent superiors were permitted to guide the institution to certain ruin. In a few years the income of the college was lost and their college sold. The students were tossed about for three years without a fixed abode; then a miserable residence was purchased in a poor district, leaving a debt of several thousand scudi. The villa at Castel Gondolfo was sold, and even the annuity of one thousand scudi was disposed of, and the purchase-money dwindled away, no one knows how, like the large rivers that are said to disappear gradually in the centre of Africa. Add to these unaccountable evils the discontent of the students themselves. Some of the fiery appeals to the Cardinal-Pro-

tector and the Holy See might well be held, at the hands of these persecuted fathers, as the wounds they received in the house of their friends. Injustice, robbery, tyranny, and ill-treatment are but feeble expressions to convey the charges unscrupulously attributed to their mismanagement. Suffice it to say that the same spirit that drove them from Portugal, France, Spain, and the two Sicilies had triumphed in the heart of Rome itself. An apostolical enquiry was instituted. One of the most damning reports ever laid before the Holy See was drawn up by Cardinal Marescotti. Appearances were not only against them, but the sale of the funds to their own novitiate was represented as an inexcusable, unpalliative injustice. The report descended to the petty complaints of the students—insufficient bread, bad wine, and tattered garments—and there were about thirty other distinct accusations of domestic treatment that excite rather contempt for the fabricators of the report and sympathy for the accused. Nevertheless, sins of mismanagement were proved against them, and on the 23d of September, 1772, Cle-

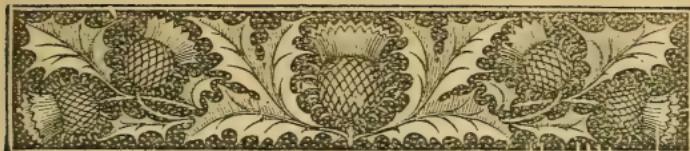
ment XIV. issued a brief, removing them from the college. This was the first indication of the displeasure of this Pope. They were banished and persecuted by the powers of the world, but in this they rejoiced, as they were honored with the fulfilment of the divine prophecy; but condemned by the Holy See, removed from their spiritual charge, and obliged to retire with their fair name blasted, was a bitter trial to the children of Ignatius. It was the prophecy of greater sorrows as keen as the sword that pierced the heart of Mary.

When the tide of misfortune sets in against man, it is surprising how new and unexpected enemies spring up on every side. The world seemed to find out suddenly that the Jesuits were all bad; men who at night boasted of being their pupils, their penitents, their friends, rose in the morning their bitterest enemies. Misrepresentations poured in from every quarter. They were removed from the direction of the Roman Seminary; the donation of Clement XIII. was taken from the Portuguese exiles; powdered ambassadors

thronged the antechambers of the Vatican, awaiting their turn to hurry in to the distracted Pontiff to announce the storms of political woe gathering in the courts of Europe on account of the poor Jesuits. Some of the patrimony of the Holy See was already seized on their account by France and Naples. The cloud was gathering darker and darker around the doomed society. At length the fatal bull, "*Dominus ac Redemptor noster*," was drawn up. The Holy Father was for three days shut up in his room, and, in an indescribable agony of doubt such as broke the heart of his predecessor, he deliberated over the momentous bull that lay on his table waiting for his signature. Finally, about eight o'clock on the evening of the 21st of July, on the parapet of the window, with the light of the moon, he signed with a trembling hand the suppression of the Society of Jesus. The Jesuits had then the care of colleges and churches to the number of 3,091, 22,589 members, and the care of millions of souls. The most remarkable event in the history of the Irish College at Rome is the part it took in the tempo-

rary suspension of the Jesuits—an event the most remarkable in modern history, the most mysterious in the designs of the divine providence that guides the Church of God. The submission with which the good fathers received the decrees of the Holy See, the grief of pious Catholics all over the world, and the very wording of the bull that condemned them, was sufficient proof that the prayers of Ignatius were heard in heaven, and that God intended great things for the Society of Jesus, since he permitted its enemies to triumph awhile. Could we seek any stronger proof of the blessing of heaven that shrouds them than the opposition that they meet now, as of old, from the impious, the irreligious, and the members of the secret societies?





## CHAPTER XVI.

LUCIA.

### I.

**H**MONGST the blessings enjoyed in this valley of tears, there are few equal to a mother's joy in the heart of a virtuous family. Forgetful of past sorrows and present cares, the cheerful hours flow on, her children healthy, beautiful, and obedient. How the gratitude of such a mother should ascend like sweet incense to the throne of God!

Alas! such joy is an oasis in the wilderness of life. For millions of the hapless daughters of Eve this ideal of domestic bliss is but a mirage that floats in aerial beauty over the desert of human sorrow, tantalizing the wearied wayfarers with a repose they shall only find at their journey's end. The sigh of heart-broken

mothers is carried on many a breeze. Childhood gave its anxious cares, but they were sweet in their burden. It is not in the age of innocence that the mother regrets her dignity; when the blooming child gladdens her soul, as he laughs back to her smile; when every prospect is bright, and fervid fancy reads in each bursting leaf of the rosebud the hopes of future greatness. But when the flower has bloomed, when vigorous adolescence breaks the leading-strings, and trusts, like the eaglet, to its own efforts; when the associations of riper years widen the circle of acquaintances and lessen the curbing influence of maternal advice, then the heart-broken mother feels the curse of the first parent on her progeny. She gazes in anguish on the harrowing picture of future ruin. See that sad countenance, those reddened eyes! No cheerful smile like sunshine plays on those beautiful features; a cloud has mantled the look that was gay; the garden-walk has no longer its innocent joys; the accustomed drive is abandoned, and visits of fashionable pastime are hated. Ask the

afflicted mother the cause of those tears, that grief that has blasted her earlier joys. "Alas! my son has fallen into the meshes of bad associations; he has become a sworn member of forbidden societies. He was a good boy, but has bad companions. He comes home drunk; he no longer heeds me," the poor mother replies, and buries her face in her hands, and her handkerchief is wet with her tears. But, poor mother, pray for your son. "Think of Monica," you will suggest in your efforts to console. "Ah! Monica was a saint; she lived in the days of miracles."

Many of our readers find a truthful picture in this ideal mother who weeps over the wanderings of a foolish son. Yet we know not what consolation to give when she abandons the anchor to which she might safely cling in the storm of her affliction—confidence in God. Could we but revive this great, consoling virtue, that shone so brightly in the lives of the early martyrs, what balm would we not bring to the wounded maternal heart! Yea, how many hapless children of misfortune would we not bring back to the paths of virtue!

The hand of God is not shortened; he wills not the death of the sinner. Miracles of conversion can gladden heaven and the weeping parent now as in the days of Monica; they are given by God in every time and in every clime, according to the measure of the faith that seeks them and the perseverance that demands them.

But there is nothing new under the sun! As in our days many a poor, widowed heart is writhing under the ill-treatment of a worthless child, so in the early days of Christianity there were weeping mothers and wayward sons, and sad, touching tales of domestic woe. The Acts of St. Lucia introduce us to one of those scenes of filial ingratitude.

“Want of affection” was marked by the great apostle of election as a sign of an unbelieving heart; but the wretch who could sell an aged mother for gain was not worthy to enjoy the light of heaven. Through the Judas-like treason of her son this holy widow was cast into the Mamertine. From its dark recess she prayed for the guilty child who mixed for old age the bitter cup of maternal sorrow. Through

his treachery the poor old mother of seventy-one years was treated with such inhumanity that we almost doubt if the barbarians of those times had anything in common with the nobler sentiments of our manhood.

The Acts, in their plain historical simplicity, have an eloquence of their own. The scene is cast under Diocletian; but here, most probably, as in other Acts, the name of the emperor is given to the prefect or tyrant who represented the emperor in condemning the Christians.

"It is reported to us," said the tyrant, when the aged widow was dragged before his throne, "that you confess and worship the crucified man called Christ, and despise our gods."

"Yes," replied Lucia, "for your gods are not able to help themselves nor those who serve them; but my Lord-Jesus Christ, for whose glory I am prepared to suffer chains, torments, and fire, will protect me. You may tear my aged body to pieces, and cause it to go sooner to the grave, which is already near; but you will not get me to worship demons."

"The judge, seeing her constancy"—we quote the Acts literally—"ordered her to be cast into the prison where the spring flows from the foundation; and when cast into this prison, the whole city was shaken as with an earthquake, and the house of the prefect who condemned her was shaken to the ground. Brought before the judge a second time, she caused by her prayers the statue of Jupiter to fall to pieces. The aged woman was stretched on the rack, beaten, and then cast into a large caldron of burning oil and pitch, in which she was shut up for three days; when the judge sent to see if anything was left of her, she was found without any injury."\* But the most extraordinary part of the Acts of this holy widow is in the events which are thus recorded:

"The impious judge, not moved to believe in Christ by this great miracle, ordered that she should be loaded with iron and lead, and be thus conducted through the principal parts of the city. They came in front of the house of a very powerful man named Germinianus, in

\* "Acts Bollandists," etc.

which there were an innumerable number of idols of demons. Whilst the holy Lucia was passing this house there descended from heaven a beautiful dove, as white as snow, and, flying, described the sign of the cross three times, and perched on the head of Germinianus. Looking up, he saw the heavens open over him; immediately taking flight, he came to the spot where the holy Lucia was being tortured, and, casting himself at her feet, related what he saw, and asked for the cleansing of baptism. There was at the same time a priest named Pothasius, to whom an angel appeared during the night, and desired him to go to the prison and baptize Germinianus, who wished that sacrament. Awaking, he hastened to the prison and poured over the holy man the saving waters.

“After the third day Lucia is brought before the judge, together with Germinianus, of whom he had heard. He tried him with many fearful torments, and then handed Lucia and Germinianus over to a most impious judge to inflict on them any torments that yet remained untried. He

first ordered their heads to be beaten with sticks; but immediately there came a terrible earthquake, and the room of the tribunal in which the judge sat fell to the ground and killed the impious judge.

"The holy martyrs were then brought before Aprofasius, under whom were put to death seventy-five martyrs, who, having seen the miracles the Lord worked in these holy saints, believed. This wicked judge, after having put these martyrs to death, was himself cast by the devil from the stone bridge into the river, and his body was never found. Then blessed Lucia and St. Germinianus were put to death by the sword by a man of consular dignity, named Megasius. A Christian woman named Maxima collected and buried their bodies in a becoming manner."

In reading these extraordinary Acts we seem like one carried in a whirlwind over scenes at one time the most beautiful and at another the most terrible the imagination can fancy. Here tortures, conversions, retributions, and miracles follow each other as fast as words can utter them, like quick waves that break on the beach..

If all that could be said of the martyrs were written, those thrilling records would fill tomes that would reach to heaven, whither their moral teaching leads us by the quicker path of thought. We love to cull flowers from these beautiful gardens of virtue, and make them the links that join Christianity of the present day with the faith and trials of the past. The prayers, the blood even, of Lucia, so cruelly shed by her son, gained pity from heaven on that unnatural son, and opened his eyes to the enormity of his guilt and the folly of his idolatry.

## II.

## A MODERN MONICA.

THE touching Acts of St. Lucia will rouse sorrowful memories in many a maternal heart. The number of mothers who have been ill-treated by ungrateful children is legion; but few, alas! are the records of those whose patience and unceasing tears have given a spiritual birth to their erring children. Amongst some

consoling examples on the pages of modern history, we will cull one of thrilling interest, which we give as a link between the past and the present, and in the hope that it may rouse to confidence the fading prayer of many an anxious parent.

### III.

A CERTAIN lady of noble family, in the North of Italy, was left a widow with four sons. She was a virtuous, good mother, and spared no pains to bring up her children in the fear of God. The three eldest responded to her maternal anxieties, were steady, obedient lads, and made great proficiency in their studies; but where is the large family that has not its trouble and its erring one? The youngest was the disgrace of the family in question. In vain the good mother sought pious masters; in vain she punished, in vain she lavished all the winning tenderness of affectionate caress. The unfortunate lad sought low company, kept late hours, and shunned the chaste joys of the family circle,

The mother wept in solitude and prayed, like another Monica, for her much-loved but erring Austin. Only poor mothers who have the misfortune to have bad sons can tell the agony that seems at times to tear asunder the tender fibres of the bleeding heart. But confidence in God and hope spread their timely balm over her wounded spirit, and, rising from prayer, she would say: "Well, I know God will yet change his heart."

Whilst thus in affliction it happened the Emperor Ferdinand of Austria visited his Lombardian possessions, and, to encourage the fidelity of those subjects, offered to take some of the children of the noble families to his own college in Vienna, where they would be prepared for their position in the Noble Guard of the empire. All who knew the afflicted Countess of — hurried with the information, as a splendid occasion of disposing of her wild son, especially as he showed a strong inclination to the military life. The good mother thought otherwise. Once away from her control and influence, God only knew the lengths he would go in his ca-

reer of infamy. At length, persuaded by all, and terrified by the threat of the prodigal that he would leave the house and bring disgrace on his family, as well as ruin to himself, she consented. With anxiety and prayers, in the midst of tears, she committed her son to the Mother of the afflicted. After Holy Communion on the morning that, with the consent of her spiritual director, she agreed to separate from her son, she went to the altar of the Blessed Virgin in the little church, and prayed thus: "O Mother of the afflicted! behold an unhappy mother who wishes to transfer her maternal rights into your hands. You must henceforth be the mother of this hapless son; you must change his heart and make him dread the awful judgments of thy Son. And, oh! how pleased should I be if, in my unworthiness, you would deign to give me some sign that you have accepted from me the burden I am not able to bear." A sweet hope diffused itself over her soul; she felt a confidence that her prayer was heard, and found more cheerfulness of soul than she had possessed for many years.

The next day they were on the road for Brescia. Different feelings animated the mother and son—the mother pensive, hopeful, and silent, repeating in her heart the prayer she had already made before the altar of Mary; the son, in the bloom of youth, painting on the canvas of a fervid fancy scenes of glory on battle-fields, and positions of honor and wealth in a successful military career. The setting sun, shrouded in luminous glory, was not more brilliant than his golden dream of ambition. But he built his future destinies without calculating the part God was to take in them.

Arrived at Brescia, a strange circumstance happened which convinced the afflicted mother that the Blessed Virgin was gained to sympathy towards her. Alighting from the diligence, a strange woman accosted the countess in these words:

“ May you be a thousand times blest, noble lady! It has been the Mother of God who has brought you amongst us to-day. I come to you in the name of the parish priest of —, who has immediate need of your assistance.”

"How! What is the matter?" enquired the countess, reading truth and innocence in the countenance of the young peasant who addressed her.

"You must know," replied the stranger with great earnestness, "there is here a small church a long time abandoned. Some persons of improper tendencies are wishing to buy it to turn it into a theatre. Our good priest is deeply afflicted. He has been for some time gathering what little alms he could to erect here a confraternity of the Sacred Heart of Mary. To-day the contract will be settled; if he is not able to pay the required sum, the church will be a house of the devil instead of the house of God and his holy Mother."

"Enough!" replied the generous countess. "You can tell your good pastor he will find me at the hotel. I shall pay what he requires." She well knew this demand was not a mere human accident, since neither the priest nor the speaker was known to her. The object of the charity so holy and the honor of her much-beloved Queen being in question, she did not hesitate a moment, but breathed in her heart the offering

for the conversion of her son, which was accepted before the throne of God.

Years have rolled on. The son has become a man. The innate passions have developed themselves in vices, and the seed sown in youth is ripe with its bitter fruit of infamy. Separation removed the painful picture of actual guilt from the eyes of the mother, and, in the fond hope that her son had abandoned the follies of youth and settled down to a more honorable career, she enjoyed comparative happiness with her other sons, faithful and dutiful children, her crown and her glory.

The sad year of 1848 dawned for Italy. The powers of darkness were permitted to stride the lovely plains and cities of that ill-fated country; to leave the traces of their presence in the ruin of religion, morality, and the domestic union of thousands. Amongst the infatuated sons of Brutus who crossed the Alps to join in the plunder of revolution was this ill-starred young Count —. He left the Noble Guard of the Austrian court to mingle with the *canaille* of Rome, rejoicing with the impious at the triumph of the secret societies,

the insult to religion in the banishment of the Pope, and the downfall of civil and religious liberty in the Christian capital of the world.

The dark night of the revolution passed, and Pius IX. returned to his throne. The cowardly leaders of the faction sneaked away to pollute the air of other regions, to plot the peace of other nations and the downfall of other kings.

One day, at the close of those troublous times, the young Count — presented himself at the house of his mother. Her surprise, indignation, and grief can only be imagined. She received him kindly, as mothers are wont; but her tears flowed again down their accustomed channels, and her little oratory rung with the sobs of an afflicted heart. There are souls who weary in prayer and abandon hope when the answer is long delayed; but the Countess — knew her prayer, her tears, would one day bear for her the realization of the consoling prophecy of Ambrose: "The child of such tears cannot perish." But it was the will of God to let the folly of her son be his punishment; that all the

deep, harrowing agonies of remorse should tear his conscience with the acknowledgment of guilt.

One day, soon after his return, he fell into a quarrel with a German officer with whom he had been drinking in one of the cafés of the city. The gloves were thrown across the table, and the friends parted to meet on the morrow to end their quarrel in a duel. He returned to his mother's house. The veil of night that wrapped the world in gloom was not darker than the cloud that enveloped his soul. Silent and frowning, he took his seat in the family circle. The anxious parent, who read disaster in his troubled looks, kindly enquired if anything were wrong.

"Yes," replied the youth, feigning an indifference he did not feel—"yes; I have just arranged to fight a duel with a German officer to-morrow morning."

If the fatal shot that was to send its winged messenger of death to the heart of her son had exploded at that moment beside her, the countess could not be more startled. Gathering all her indignation, she poured forth an eloquent invective on

the hardened youth. "Unfortunate son!" she cried, "did you not know that duelling is forbidden by human and divine law? You care nothing for life, the salvation of your soul, the honor of your family, the tears and broken heart of your poor mother!"

She buried her face in her hands. A dreadful silence hung over the mother and son; it was only broken by her convulsive sobs. At length the young count spoke in a low tone: "I place my honor before everything."

"Honor!" replied his mother frantically. "'Tis a false suggestion of hell—the phantom of your pride that allures you to ruin! Submission to the eternal laws that guide us, resistance to the passions that ruin us, is the highest and only honor. God forbid that such infamy should taint the unsullied name of thy family. Son! see how you break this heart that has loved you, disloyal and disobedient as you have been. You know, if my life could save you from your follies, I would have sacrificed it to save you; but now the last favor I will ask of you is

to spare me this blow. Fly, fly from this house, this country, and seek to retrieve thy lost character amongst a people who know not thy infamy."

She left him in tears, and flew to her own chamber. Suddenly returning, she placed in his hand a purse full of gold, and bade him leave the house. "Go, ungrateful child! and never let me see you again, unless an altered man."

He rose without saying a word, and proceeded to the door. She followed in tears. At the door he paused for a moment to take a last long and affectionate look at the mother he loved amidst all his follies. Whilst yet on the steps of the portico she called him by his name, and said: "The Immaculate Queen of Heaven shall be henceforth your mother; do not forget her." He had disappeared in the dark street, and the mother waited to hear the last, faint echo of his quick step, as he fled in disgrace from the happy home he would never see again.

He arrived in another part of Lombardy, where he became the victim of the most harrowing internal agony. Shame and re-

morse followed him with persecution, and his pride was wounded to the core. At one moment he regretted his ignominious flight. In fancy he heard the brave boast of his antagonist in the cafés and at the billiard-tables, and the scornful remarks of his former lewd companions. Blasted in every ambition, lost to his military honor and cherished hopes, even his name and nobility for ever abandoned, and before him a life of obscurity and ignominy, we can well fancy what spirit of comfort whispered its diabolical suggestions at this sad hour. Is there not rest in the tomb? Does not death calm the throbings of a breaking heart? He bravely resisted the dreadful thought for a while; but not seeking assistance where alone it is to be found, he gradually drifted into that melancholy desperation which closes a career of crime with the last and terrible guilt of suicide.

Still feebly combating with the python that had coiled around his heart, he determined to take a voyage to the East, hoping that the change of scenery and variety of travel would bring the repose of forgetfulness. He embarked on board a steamer

at Venice and sailed for Constantinople. The sea has no comfort for the soul pursued by its own memories; its troubled surface, its wild, dreary waste of solitude, and the mournful sound of the night wind through the rigging, are echoes of melancholy thought and incentives to greater despair. It was so with the young count. He determined to bury beneath the dark wave the wreck of his fallen manhood; to end in some gloomy cavern of the deep a career that had no sunshine above. The fatal determination once taken, he put it into execution in sight of the city of Constantinople.

The dawn was breaking in the east when the vessel cast anchor in the harbor. The sailors heard a strange splash, but could not determine, in the uncertain light, what had fallen in. When daylight came, the absence of the gloomy, solitary passenger convinced them of his hapless end. Not seeing any traces of his body on the waters, they concluded that he had been devoured by the sharks that abound in those seas. His fellow-passengers passed their comments on his folly. Some pitied him as

the victim of misfortune, others trembled for the fate of his soul; but scarcely an hour passed when the wonder was over. The bustle and preparation for disembarking occupied their attention, and no one thought any longer of the stranger who had committed suicide. But who will set a limit to the mercy of God? Who will explain the unsearchable ways of divine Providence? There were two afflicted mothers pleading before the throne of God for that young man. He was saved. At the very moment that he intended to commit suicide the Holy Sacrifice was offered in the little Church of the Sacred Heart of Mary at Brescia for the intention of the Countess —. It was, however, the will of God to allow him to go thus far in his folly, that the favor of his salvation might be incontestably the work of prayer —the prayer of the afflicted mother on earth, the prayer of the powerful Mother in heaven. The particulars of his miraculous protection is given by the young man himself, and sealed with his oath on his death-bed. Hear his own description of this extraordinary miracle:

"Plunged into the dark waters, I heard the wave close over me, and, instead of repenting of my iniquity, I endeavored to sink deeper into the gulf and end my wretched life, when, behold, I felt a strong, robust hand push me again to the surface to breathe the hated air. Determined to die, I dived again into the water; but the same hand sent me floating again to the surface, as if saying to me, 'You shall not die.' Once more I plunged with all my force into the dark waters, but that friendly hand not only kept me from sinking, but brought me, I know not how, in the twinkling of an eye, to the shore. I was stunned, and, although unable to explain what had happened, I heard in that moment the howls of demons, I saw frightful monsters, and felt as I never felt before. On the beach I opened my eyes, and saw not far from me a forest of ships, the houses and domes of the city, and, memory returning, I remembered I was near Constantinople. The desire of life returned to me; but I felt so frightened and so weak I could neither move nor call for help. In this plight, after a considerable

time, I saw some Turks coming towards me; they viewed me for a few moments, but from my appearance and dress judged me to be a Christian, and, turning away with suppressed contempt, said: ‘He is some Christian dog; let him die of his malady!’ How bitterly these words sounded in my ears may be easily imagined—a dog, to be left to perish without the least relief, without a tear of compassion; and if I am a dog, who has saved me from drowning, who has brought me to this beach? I was thus thinking to myself when I heard ringing through my memory the last words of my mother, commanding me not to forget the most holy Virgin. I then did not doubt that she had saved me by a miracle; but wherefore, I thought to myself, if I am now to die amongst Turks and worse than a beast? With agonizing thoughts and full of repentance I turned towards my heavenly Protector, recalling the days when I prayed with fervor, and cried out from the bottom of my heart, ‘O most holy Virgin! be my mother; have compassion on me.’ It was the first prayer I had made in many years.

"At a distance I perceived approaching a man of venerable appearance, dressed in a long garment and cowl, with the white cord at his side. I recognized him immediately as one of the Reformed Franciscan Fathers. He approached me, and, casting a compassionate look on me, asked me in German whence I came, what had happened to me, and if he could help me. I understood him perfectly, but the confusion of thoughts and the languor I felt prevented me from answering distinctly. He then spoke in French, and again the good father thought I did not understand him. Finally he spoke in Italian. The sound of my mother-tongue seemed to send a new thrill of life through me, and I replied to him: 'I come from Italy, a fugitive from my country; and I live because I could not die.' Animated with zeal at this reply, he anxiously enquired: 'From what part of Italy do you come?'

" 'From Lombardy, father.'

" 'From Lombardy! What city?'

" 'The city of \_\_\_\_.'

" 'If you will permit, may I ask of what

family? Do you know the Countess of ——?"

"She is my mother."

"At this reply the good religious threw himself on me, embraced me, and wept. Kneeling by me, he stretched his hands to heaven, and said in amazement: 'The son of my benefactress in this plight! I thank divine Providence for casting into my hands this man, that I may repay in him the services rendered me by his mother.'"

A few words of explanation followed. This religious had spent much time in Lombardy, and was well known to the Countess ——, whose charity was felt in a wide and grateful circle. The father was called by his superior to one of the Eastern missions, and was then but on his journey, resting for a few days in the city of Constantinople. The Countess of —— had, but a few days before, given him a large sum of money to procure necessary comforts on his long and fatiguing journey.

In joy that welled from a grateful heart he lavished every attention on the unfor-

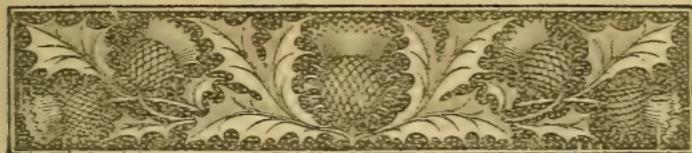
tunate young count. He had him brought to the hospital of the Sisters of Charity; and, as he announced his name and title as one of the Noble Guard of Vienna, the Grand Seignior sent him eight soldiers as a guard of honor. We need not tell the happy conversion which the reader may have already anticipated. Oh! that we could have heard the joyful strains of the heavenly choir when the powerful words of absolution fell on that penitent, bleeding, altered heart! Tears like those that moistened the hospital-bed of the dying count were pearls gathered by angelic hands to adorn the penitent's crown.

The Franciscan father communicated the whole adventure to the Countess —. Her joy at his conversion was greater than her grief at the announcement that there was no hope of his recovery. She sent two of her sons immediately to Constantinople to console him in his last hour and to bear to him her blessing and forgiveness. They arrived in time to find him sinking under a lingering fever. No language could tell his joy on receiving the message, or the gratitude his heart wished

to send to his mother. One of his brothers had to hasten back to Italy; but the other remained to receive his last sigh, and saw him laid in the tomb he had once, in the madness of desperation, so foolishly desired.\*

\* See *Civiltà Cattolica*, Vol. x. Series 2; also a small work published by Marietti. The names are suppressed at the request of the mother, who is still living. The authenticity of this interesting fact is beyond question, and may be had from the directors of the *Civiltà Cattolica*.





## CHAPTER XVII.

CYRIACUS.

### I.

**A**LARGE number of the bricks used in the Baths of Diocletian are marked with the sign of the cross. Is it the trade-mark of some wealthy merchant who supplied millions of those tiles for the vast thermal fabric? Is it a sign by which the master-masons should determine their position in the building? No; it is the sacred memorial of the sorrows and hopes of an affectionate people; it is a Christian sign traced by Christian hands.

Reader, wrap your cloak around you and follow us in fancy as Dante followed Virgil; we will bring you to contemplate a sad but interesting scene in the his-

tory of the past. Trust to the borrowed wings of fancy, and leap over a gulf of fifteen centuries, without pausing to consider the rise and fall of nations, the records of bloody wars, and the ever-varying vicissitudes of time heaped into the valley of the past. We find ourselves in Rome at the end of the third century. On a level site between the Viminal and Quirinal Hills a stupendous edifice is rising towards heaven in costly magnificence. It covers one hundred and fifty thousand square yards, and has forty thousand laborers employed. Amidst the buzz and din of work you hear the loud, coarse voice of the overseers, and perhaps the ringing lash of the whip goading on the poor slaves to work more than they are able. See those poor laborers! Many are clothed in a faded and torn military dress; a calm melancholy hangs over their emaciated looks, and many a red, glistening eye tells a tale of constant tears. You hear the audible murmur of verses from the well-known Psalms of David, now and then hushed as the overseer approaches. The young help the aged

who tremble and sink under their burdens. There are no blasphemies against heaven, no imprecations on the inhuman task-masters; the silence of the deep broods over the moving mass. These laborers are Christians!

In the year 302 Maximian returned from a successful campaign against the Persians. In the army there were many Christians, especially in one of the legions from Spain, recalled for this special expedition. Under the direction and influence of the tribune Zeno thousands of the veteran soldiers were brought to the worship of the true God. When the pre-occupation and horrors of war had ceased, the demons found employment for the time of peace in firing the brutal passions of the Emperor Maximian. The persecution was renewed with all its violence; for more blood was required to nourish the roots of the infant Church. In a species of gratitude to Diocletian, who raised him to the purple, this tyrant conceived the idea of erecting in his honor the largest and richest thermæ ever built in Rome. The Christians were con-

demned to be the slaves and convicts of the labor. The heroes of the army, instead of rest after the fatigues of the campaign, and a share in the spoils of the enemy, were the first victims; wherever the followers of the Crucified could be found throughout the empire, irrespective of position or wealth, they were driven, by treatment given only to slaves in those days, to assist in the erection of this stupendous monument of imperial extravagance. On the authority of several Acts (quoted by Baronius) we believe the number exceeded forty thousand.

What must have been the sufferings of those poor Christians no pen can describe. Death would have been a thousand times more welcome than those long, lingering years of hardship and privation. The axe, the rack, or the furnace had but momentary pangs, and then came eternal rest; but here, worse than death, was the bitter agony of prolonged suffering. There were amongst these poor Christians the wealthy, the educated, and the offspring of patrician blood, dragged from comfortable homes and the bosoms of their families,

clothed in tattered and filthy garments, and made to mix the mortar for the masons, to shape bricks, or to carry sand on their shoulders to the top of the scaffolding; and when, through delicacy of limbs or weakness, or through want of food, they would fall under their load, they were kicked and beaten like poor, ill-treated beasts of burden, until they would rise and try again. Do we wonder that the bricks of this fabric are marked with the sign of the cross? It was the only consolation and hope of those suffering Christians. If tears were indelible, we would see those crosses surrounded by the crystal stars that flow in tepid drops from the fountains of human sorrow.

Seven long years passed over those sufferers. Nearly thirty thousand found relief in the bosom of God. They were carried to the sepulchres of slaves or stolen away by the Christians. The Church, who honors them in heaven on the feast of All Saints, has not even a name or a relic of those who died for the faith during the building of the Baths of Diocletian. The survivors numbered ten

thousand two hundred and three. Perhaps these hard-worked and heart-broken laborers are rewarded from the public treasury and sent to their homes, browned by the sun and enfeebled by years of toil, yet happy in the recovery of liberty. Yes, they will be sent to their eternal home under the blood-stained sword of martyrdom; their reward awaits them beyond the stars. The Acts tell us they were led out of the city in company with the brave tribune Zeno, and at the Aquas Salvias, near the spot where St. Paul was beheaded, were executed in one day.

Ten thousand three hundred and one martyrs put to death in the one place and in the space of a few hours! How this announcement falls on us like the child's first view of the ocean or the traveller's first look at Niagara! We are struck with silent awe; no words could convey our thoughts. Our souls soar like terrified spirits over the field of carnage. Rome has sent forth her stalwart sons to battle. No enemy is in sight; no powerful nation has thrown down the gauntlet; no plundering army is on the march to the

capital; yet there is the bloodiest field in the annals of Rome. Patient, unresisting, they are led to death like the typical animal that goes to slaughter in silence.

We must return to the Baths of Diocletian. There are still other interesting reminiscences around this monument of the past. Its career of licentious pleasure was short-lived; it was rifled before the touch of time had crumbled its massive walls; it fell with the giant spirit of tyranny and paganism that caused its foundations to be cemented with the tears of the Christians. Yet these ruins were dear to the angels. Forty thousand of them were employed here, more or less, for seven years, recording in the brilliant pages of the book of eternal life the acts of patience, resignation, and union with Jesus in his Passion merited by the poor Christians who labored at this edifice. These angels watched the ruins with all the solicitude of affectionate memory; they love as we do the things that give glory to God. Away in their arbors of eternal bliss they resolved to have these ruins converted into a church dedicated to their

Queen. They deputed their seven chiefs to see the project carried out, and behold how God permitted their designs to be accomplished.

About the close of the fifteenth century there was a pious priest in the city of Palermo named Antonio di Duca, who had an extraordinary devotion towards the holy angels. He labored hard to spread this beautiful devotion amongst his people. In Sicily churches were built and confraternities established in honor of those glorious spirits, so dear to God and so powerful by his throne. Miracles and extraordinary graces attended the preaching of this holy priest, thereby showing the manifest approbation of God, who will have us honor those whom he himself has so highly honored.

It is said in the life of this servant of God that, in reward for his devotion towards the holy angels, one day he found a picture of the seven archangels miraculously painted on the walls of his room, which painting is still preserved with great reverence and devotion in the city of Palermo. After the celebration of Mass

one day he had a consoling vision. He was told to repair to Rome, to receive the approbation and indulgences of the Holy See for the confraternities he had established, to spread the devotion in that city, and to have the ruins of the Baths of Diocletian converted into a church under the invocation of the Queen of Angels. The Ven. Antonio hastened to the capital of the Christian world, and was received in affection and honor by Paul III. The good priest endeavored to have the ruins of the Baths converted into a church; but several architects, having studied the walls and halls as they stood, abandoned the project as too difficult. The central hall or triclinium of the ruins was still in a perfect state of preservation, but was too large for the proposed church, and would involve more expense than was at command. Antonio di Duca had to abandon the idea in deep regret, and returned to his people in Palermo.

Some years passed. The holy priest, now old and feeble, was sinking to the grave. One thought gave him deep regret: the church was not yet built in

the ruins of the Baths of Diocletian. Fer-  
vently he prayed to God that he might have  
this favor before closing his eyes on the  
scenes of earth. Behold! his prayer was  
heard, and one of the messengers of hea-  
ven stood in dazzling brightness beside  
him. The angel brought him in spirit to  
the ruins, and showed him the Church of  
St. Maria degli Angioli, as it now stands.  
He bade the old man repair once more  
to Rome, and he would find little diffi-  
culty in accomplishing the desired change.  
The holy Pontiff Pius IV. was in the chair  
of St. Peter. He heard the extraordinary  
statement. The great Michael Angelo was  
in the court. He was sent for by the  
Pope, and requested to accompany the  
venerable priest to the ruins. The bril-  
liant genius of the immortal artist caught  
the idea suggested by the celestial Angelo,  
and behold we have one of the state-  
liest and most striking churches of Rome,  
unique and splendid in its stately pro-  
portions, retaining the magnificence and  
grandeur of the ancient thermal edifice to  
lend becoming majesty to the temple of  
the Most High. It was consecrated by

Pius IV. in 1563, amidst the joy of a pious people, whose hymns and canticles of praise, chanted in the majestic ceremonial of dedication, were but the faint echo of the choirs of millions of rejoicing angels, led on by their immaculate Queen in the regions of bliss, singing their grateful *Te Deums* around the throne of the Eternal.

## II.

AMONGST the poor, suffering Christians at the Baths of Diocletian is cast the scene of some of the extraordinary facts we have to relate. As the laborers suffered from want of food, Cyriacus, who escaped detection, brought food and other comforts to them under the shadows of night. Here he was seized and brought before the emperor; but before we enter into the interesting particulars of his martyrdom we will give an outline of his early history.

In a MS. preserved in the Vatican, and quoted by the Bollandists, we have some particulars of the early history and conversion of St. Cyriacus. It is evidently written by an inexperienced hand, and has

many inconsistencies as to names and dates, as the learned Jesuit Cupar shows in his introduction to these Acts; nevertheless, it contains some very interesting facts, and will serve to show the reverence and honor towards this great martyr. We will give a few of its anecdotes, especially those which regard his relics and the origin of the Church of St. Marcellus on the Corso.

It seems that St. Cyriacus was a man of great learning. He was what the people of those times called a philosopher. Being of noble birth and undoubted ability, he was invited to the imperial palace by Diocletian and Maximian. He won the esteem of these emperors, and became the greatest favorite at the court. From the light of reason he saw that paganism, with its magnificent temples, and priests, and sacrifices, was nothing but a gigantic swindle. Assisting on one occasion at a sacrifice in honor of Mars, he was so disgusted that he left the temple with the intention of becoming a Christian. All that day and the whole of the next night were spent by him in great

anxiety and thought. We may say he suffered the usual struggle which the converted soul has with the devil and its own passions against the calls and promptings of divine grace. Alas! many yield in this struggle and give hell a victory; the grace of conversion, perhaps, never returns. There are many souls in hell now who were once destined and called to high positions of glory. Cyriacus did not yield in this combat. At daylight the next morning he leaped from his couch, bade farewell to the vanities and luxuries of the imperial palace, and sought the house of some Christians in the city.

By divine inspiration he was guided to a house where the Christians were assembled. The doors were closed, but he could hear them singing within. It happened that the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass had at that moment commenced, and the choir of the little band of Christians was singing some selections from the Psalms or other sacred pieces. He paused and listened at the door. There was a sermon. The words of the preacher struck him as if intended for himself. The text was,

“He that followeth me walketh not in darkness.” The moment the sermon was over he rapped at the door. When they saw him, they were terrified, for they knew him to be one of the satellites of the tyrant Diocletian, and commenced immediately to prepare for martyrdom, which every Christian was momentarily expecting in those days of terror. But Cyriacus made known the object of his visit; they received him with joy, and continued the celebration of the divine mysteries. When Mass was over, he was sent with three deacons, Sinsinius, Smaragdus, and Largus, to the holy Pope Caius, who was already informed by an angel that God had made Cyriacus a vessel of election. His baptism was followed by the liberty of some hundreds of slaves, the distribution of wealth to the poor, and the great joy of the Christians for the conversion of such a learned and wealthy man.

Nearly twenty years rolled over from the baptism of Cyriacus to the building of the Baths of Diocletian, where we next find our saint mentioned in the Acts. He spent that time in the practice of every

virtue. So generously did he give himself to the service of God that he was selected by Providence to be one of the apostles and pillars of the infant Church in those terrible days of trial. Once a wealthy, powerful patrician, gifted with the knowledge of the schools of those days, we find him now, in all the attractive lowness of Christian humility, carrying bread on his shoulders to relieve his famished and suffering brethren at the Baths. A wealthy convert named Thrason supplied means to purchase those necessaries for the poor Christians, and entrusted to Cyriacus and his companions, Largus and Smaragdus, the conveyance and dispensing of those welcome aids. In the darkness of the night, when all was still, those brave souls crept in the shadows of the walls and got in amongst the Christians, who lay together on the cold earth, exposed to the sharp winter blast and prostrate with hunger and fatigue. How welcome were the visits of those angels of charity! The kind, consoling words of the aged Cyriacus and his companions fell like balm on their breaking hearts.

Cyriacus was the means of bringing still greater joy to those Christians; for the holy Pope Marcellus, hearing of his charity, ordained him a deacon, that he might bring to them not only the welcome sustenance for the weakened frame of humanity, but also the spiritual food of their souls in the dread mysteries of the altar.

The emperor and the rulers of Rome looked down with contempt from the pride of their power and their palaces of gold on the poor Christian slave; but He who alone is great, at whose beck the pillars of heaven tremble, around whom myriad worlds whirl in unbroken harmony, comes from the throne of his glory to console him! Whilst he prepares the thunders of a dreadful retribution for the cruel, unbelieving man of power and wealth, he comes to the poor, forsaken victim of injustice, whose bed is the earth covered with straw, whose pillow is a hard board, and whose covering is a sackcloth. To him Jesus imparts a flood of consolation and joy; for the loving heart of Jesus is moved to pity and compassion when other hearts are harder than stones.

Thus Cyriacus spent some years in this holy employment. There is a tradition (not mentioned in the Acts) that, during this time, he converted the architect who directed the erection of this vast edifice. But it pleased God to try and still further purify these holy servants by casting them into the hands of their enemies, and thus to prepare the way for the manifestation of his power and the confusion of the haughty persecutors of the Church.

One night, when, as usual, they were bringing food to the Christians, they were discovered by the guards and seized. The next day they were cast into the public prison, and on the third day afterwards the tribune reported the circumstance to Maximian. He ordered them to dig sand in one of the sand-pits, and then bring it on their shoulders to the Baths. There was amongst them a feeble old man named Saturninus, whom old age had rendered unfit for labor. The holy deacons Cyriacus and Sinsinius assisted him, and others who also required assistance, by carrying their burdens along with their own. The poor pagans, who knew nothing of the sublime

principle of Christian charity, marvelled at the goodness of those holy deacons, and related what they saw to the emperor. They reported at the same time that these Christians seemed to be quite happy, and were singing praises and hymns the whole day. Maximian then ordered Sinsinius to be brought before him.

"How are you called?" asked the emperor.

Sinsinius replied: "I am the sinner Sinsinius, and I am called the servant of the servants of Christ."

"What are those songs you have among you?"

Sinsinius replied: "If you knew the hymns of the faithful, you would also know your Creator."

"And who is the Creator but the invincible Hercules?"

"With us it is wrong even to name him or to hear of him," replied Sinsinius firmly.

Maximian then said: "Hasten and choose one of the two: either sacrifice to Hercules or undergo the burning of your flesh."

"I have always desired this," replied Sinsinius. "Oh! that I were worthy of such a long-wished-for crown."

Then Maximian, angry, handed him over to Laodicius, the prefect, who had him cast into the Mamertine prison, where he was detained seventeen days.

At this time there was in care of the Mamertine a well-meaning man named Apronianus. We doubt not that he was in frequent conversation with the martyrs under his care, and, perhaps for some kindness which he showed them, Almighty God was pleased with him, and called him to the knowledge of the faith by a great miracle. Laodicius, the prefect, wished to have the martyrs brought before him; and when Apronianus came to the opening through which his wretched victims were cast into their dungeon, he was dazzled with a brilliant column of light that came from the prison where the martyrs were confined, whilst, terrified and fixed to the ground at this strange appearance, he heard a voice overhead saying: "Come, ye blessed of my Father, and take possession of the kingdom prepared for you."

All was again darkness; but that heavenly light remained in the soul of Apronianus. Casting himself at the feet of his prisoners, he asked to be allowed to accompany them to the kingdom prepared for them above. There and then, in the gloomy chamber of their prison, and probably from the miraculous well of St. Peter, they baptized Apronianus. The holy Pope Marcellus was sent for; he came and confirmed the neophyte, and the Acts say that he consecrated an altar and administered to them all the body and blood of Christ.

Towards evening the prefect, wondering, perhaps, why his orders were not obeyed, sent again to the prison to have Sinsinius and Saturninus brought before him. Apronianus, now filled with the fortitude of the Holy Spirit, and burning with the zeal of his first fervor, accompanied them to the prefect. Immediately he had come into his presence he cried out:

“Why let the devil induce you to afflict so much those servants of God?”

“How! do I also see that you have become a Christian?” said Laodicius, surprised.

Apronianus replied with a sigh, "Alas! unfortunate I have been. I have lost my days."

"Indeed you will lose them now," said the prefect; and immediately ordered him to be beheaded, saying, "If this man be not put out of the way, many will be ruined."

Apronianus was conducted to the second milestone on the Via Salaria, and received the crown of martyrdom.

All this seems to have taken place in the space of a few hours. In the morning this noble martyr walked in the darkness of the shadow of death, and in the evening he stood amidst the galaxy of heaven's spirits in the sunshine of eternal glory. Such sudden calls of grace and such heroic correspondence are miracles of the mercy and goodness of God. In closing this martyrdom as briefly as the Acts describe it we cannot but notice two things: first, that it is a fortunate thing to deal with true servants of Jesus Christ; and, second, we should never despise any one, for the person whom we despise may be pleasing to God, and may be sent before us to the glory of heaven.

After this martyrdom the Acts tell us that the aged Saturninus and Sinsinius were again cast into prison, and detained there forty-two days. During that time they converted and baptized a great number of pagans. The very prison itself became the rendezvous of the persecuted Christians, and from those dungeons of horror, darkness, and privation there came light, consolation, and heavenly gifts. The ways of God are different from those of men.

Once more brought before Laodicius, they boldly declared they would never humble themselves to demons and stones; and here Almighty God rewarded their fidelity with other extraordinary additions to the harvest of souls they had already gathered to Christ. The prefect ordered a tripod to be brought in, that they might burn incense to the goddess of the earth, in whose temple he had his throne erected for the judgment of the martyrs. The aged Saturninus breathed on the tripod and said, "May the God of nations destroy thee!" Immediately it broke into so many pieces that nothing but dust fell to

the ground. Seeing this miracle, two soldiers who were guarding the martyrs cried out: "Truly he is God, the Lord Jesus Christ whom these worship."

This was the signal for the scene of torture. The two soldiers, Papias and Maurus, were stretched on the rack and beaten with clubs. They gave thanks to God that he permitted them to suffer with his servants; and when they bravely reproved the tyranny of the judge for persecuting the innocent Christians, he ordered their mouths to be beaten with stones. Taken from the rack, he had them cast into prison, and then turned to vent his rage on Saturninus and Sinsinius. They were stripped, suspended from a post, and burning torches were applied to their sides. Their trials were ended by decapitation at the second milestone on the Nomentan Way, and their bodies were buried by the priest John and the good Thrason, who had supplied food for the poor Christians at the Baths.

The two soldiers were afterwards instructed and baptized in prison by the Pope Marcellus, and after twelve days

were beaten to death. They were buried on the Nomentan Way, in the crypts called *ad Nymphas S. Petri*.

### III.

IN the meantime the holy deacon Cyriacus was laboring in the sand-pits on the Salarian Way. The place may still be seen adjoining the Catacombs of Thrason. The great ones of this world are clothed in purple and live in the palaces of kings, but the truly great before God are the poor and despised before the world, as the touching sequel of this story beautifully illustrates.

The Spirit of God cast a halo of sanctity around his servant. Destined by Providence for the salvation of many, he was soon discovered in his humble labors in the sand-pit. His fame had spread amongst the poor. He was the consolation and encouragement, not only of the two companions, Smaragdus and Largus, whom God left always near him, but of all those who were condemned to the same pit. What lessons we must learn

when in fancy we see this aged man laying down a sack of sand from his shoulders to give sight to some poor, blind creature; leaving his shovel against the bank to cure a palsy or paralyzed limb! In the garb of a slave and a criminal, condemned unjustly for bringing bread to the poor Christians, to labor like a convict in the public works, yet here was the favorite of the Most High; here was the humble soul more pleasing to God than the kings and princes who were tyrants and monsters in the little power given to them.

Two years, probably, were spent by Cyriacus at the sand-pits. The emperor had forgotten him, but Almighty God had not, and the time had come when Providence had arranged that Cyriacus should work greater wonders and gather more souls to the love of God. A devil was permitted to take possession of the adopted daughter of Diocletian. Her name was Artemia. The emperor loved her very much, and was deeply affected when he found that all the skill of physicians and all the sacrifices to gods, that were as dumb

as the stones that represented them, availed nothing. The girl was dreadfully tortured; her shrieks and contortions would move the hardest heart to pity. At length the devil was obliged by God to declare that only Cyriacus could drive him from the person of Artemia. "I will not leave unless Cyriacus the deacon drive me."

In the stronger passion of affection Diocletian smothered the feelings of hatred. The impiety that dictated and encouraged the carnage of the noble blood at that moment shed in every province of the empire was forgotten in the selfish hope of an advantage to be gained from one of the persecuted sect. Cyriacus was summoned from his prison, from his chains, and from obscurity to tread again in honor the marble halls of the imperial palace. In years gone by, in the days of his vanity and pride, Cyriacus was a welcome guest even in the triclinium of Diocletian; but now, gifted with a sublimer science than was ever known in the folly of paganism, venerable in his appearance, and sanctified by penitential austerities, he

appears at the royal palace as a messenger from the other world to combat the powers of darkness in one of their earthly strongholds. On his entering the room of the afflicted Artemia the devil trembled and showed in her person the terror the demons must feel at the name of Jesus. "My daughter," said Cyriacus gently, "believe in God the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, his only Son." Poor Artemia, who was unable to speak, nodded assent; but the foul spirit cried out, "O Cyriacus! if you drive me out of this, I will bring you all the way to Persia." The command was given in the name of Jesus. The girl gave a fearful contortion and a yell of anguish. She was free. She looked up with a smile of gratitude, and with tears of joy embraced her relatives who stood around. Casting herself at the feet of her liberator, she prayed to be baptized in that sacred name which had drawn her from the grasp of the infernal fiend. In a few days our saint poured the holy waters of baptism on Artemia and her mother, Serena.

Perhaps the most remarkable event in

the reign of Diocletian or in the Acts of Cyriacus was the effect of this miracle. To other emperors, as we have seen elsewhere, similar favors have been granted through the servants of God; but they attributed everything to the power of magic, and, instead of recognizing the power of the Christian God, they became more enraged towards their benefactors. Gratitude was a virtue little known amongst the pagans. But to the credit of a tyrant second only to Nero, we have to record that Diocletian was grateful on this occasion. The Acts do not say it, but his subsequent conduct towards the martyrs proves it. He did not order the lictors to bind Cyriacus because he was a magician, and cast him to the lions of the Coliseum, as we read of emperors who bear better names than Diocletian. At the imperial order a magnificent house was given to Cyriacus and his companions; freedom, the royal favor, and a maintenance from the treasury were conferred on him. A stranger contrast could not be imagined. The world was groan-

ing from East to West under the tyranny of this reign. Christian blood was flowing in copious streams in every city of the empire, and all the efforts of the supreme power were directed to annihilate Christianity. Yet the full fury of the storm had not come, and the prosperity of Cyriacus was but an isolated sunbeam. It would seem that God permitted the prosperity of Cyriacus, that he might bring consolation to the suffering Christians at the Baths. Fortified with the royal permission, he had free access to those hapless victims of Maximian's tyranny, and he was their angel of consolation. It is probable that during this time he converted the architect of the Baths; and thus, if the tradition be true, they were Christian architects who designed the two most remarkable buildings connected with the persecution of Christianity — the Coliseum and the Baths of Diocletian.

Cyriacus knew well the danger as well as the short-lived character of his prosperous condition. The science of the saints had long warned him of the snares of

evil, and even the judgment of God, that is too often concealed beneath the smiles of fortune

“With such unshaken temper of the soul  
To bear the swelling tide of prosp’rous fortune  
Is to deserve that fortune. In adversity  
The mind grows rough by buffeting the tempest;  
But in success, dissolving, sinks to ease  
And loses all her firmness.”

Would that the useful lesson given us by the early Christians in their fears of worldly prosperity were more impressed on the minds of the Christians of these days! The truly humble soul, filled with the Spirit of God, is seldom found amidst wealth and luxury. It is amidst the horrors of war and the ravages of an epidemic that the churches empty in the time of peace, are filled with the groans and sighs of an afflicted people supplicating the mercy of God. In peace, in prosperity, he is forgotten. The thunders of his wrath are not feared until they roar in terror above us.

The great apostles of evangelical perfection, the founders of religious orders, prayed to God for some mark of his ap-

probation. He heard their prayer and placed their communities, like his rock-built church, in the heart of the storm, the target for every outrage the spirit of the world and hell can cast on them. The smile of his approving providence found its expression in humiliation, confiscation, and exile. Strange mystery! All that is evil in the hostility of the impious is the blessing of God to the good. Thus the injuries inflicted on us by the persecutors of our faith, to the seizure of our goods and the shedding of our blood, are the blessings that mark the highest approbation of our God. Stranger still the awful judgment that is found in prosperity. Whom God loves he tries. We tremble at the application of the contrary proposition. There are men, successful in every undertaking, rich in everything the world loves, wealth pouring in on them from every side; the very failures of the land and the disasters of the sea are the sources of gain to them; yet these men oppress the poor, ridicule the sacred, and indulge in the sensual. Their prosperity is their judgment. Some good

action in more virtuous days, some natural quality seen by the Searcher of hearts, who gives each one his due, find their recompense in the short-lived joys of time. But woe to the recipients of such favors; they have received their reward. How this terrible warning must ring in the ears of the rich, like the mournful whoop of the ill-omened night-owl from the house-tops and summits of these palaces, which have been cemented in the blood, the tears, and the possessions of the innocent, crying out incessantly: "Woe! woe!"

It is related of St. Ambrose that when going to Rome, accompanied by some priests of Milan, extraordinary atmospheric appearances terrified him while on his journey, and forced him to accept hospitality from the possessor of a castle on the way. When seated at table with his host, to whom he had been casually introduced, he perceived he was a man who had amassed wealth by all kinds of exactions, frauds, and injustices. Elated with prosperity, this man boasted that he had never experienced either mental or cor-

poral suffering; his fortune was great, his wife beautiful, and his children healthy and robust. While listening to him St. Ambrose was at first sorrowful and surprised on beholding iniquity so shamelessly avowed; but his astonishment soon gave way to fear. "Let us go hence," said he, as he hastily quitted the splendid repast which had just been served—"let us go hence, brethren; the prosperity of this man makes me fear. Something tells me its end is nigh." The prelate's attendants, seized with consternation, hastily mounted their horses, and, notwithstanding the dense and suffocating atmosphere, immediately resumed their journey. They had not proceeded above a quarter of a mile when a violent earthquake was felt. The Milanese who followed the archbishop, when the first fear was passed, looked behind them to see the effects of this terrific commotion. What was their surprise on seeing that the magnificent villa they had just quitted had completely disappeared, that its place was occupied by a miry pool, and that the earth had stifled the groans of its wretched inhabitants.

There is another circumstance connected with the prosperity of the Christian, another great truth inculcated in the heroic life of Cyriacus, which must come home to many of our English readers. In the time of Jeremias the idolaters of Judea offered gifts on the roofs of their houses to the queen of the night—the Phœnician Astarte. They attributed the triumph of the Assyrians to these idolatrous practices. When the indignant prophet reproved them for their folly, they boldly answered that since they had ceased to worship that divinity they had experienced the want of all things: “From the time we ceased to sacrifice and offer libations to the queen of heaven we have wanted all things, and are consumed by the sword and hunger.” \*

Behold a faith that seeks temporal reward! Behold a regret that may find an echo in many a discontented heart! Those Jews thought that when they consented to burn a few grains of incense in honor of God, each grain should come back with wealth more than a hundred-fold

\* *Jer. xliv. 18.*

The faith that lives on gain is blasted with the first breath of adversity. It is the house built on the sandy beach, that totters under the wave of the returning tide that rolls against it. How often has not the fear of temporal loss warped the generous resolve in the half-converted heart, and bartered for a paltry temporal gain the hope of eternal joy! To become a Christian is to prepare for every alternative—death, poverty, and the ridicule of unbelieving friends. Such was the example given us by the martyrs. Amongst the pagans of old there were brave men who declared themselves Christians under the very sword that was reeking with Christian blood; others leaped into the arena of the Coliseum, where thousands of an infuriated mob were calling to have them cast to the lions; and others embraced the faith whilst the rack that was dislocating the bones of the Christian victims was creaking in their ears. In the conversion to Christianity in the early days there was no sordid consideration of temporal consequences. In those days faith was noble, brave, divine. It was

not the cunning compliance of a hypocrite to unloosen the purse-strings of a Christian father-in-law; it was not a speculation for a finer house or richer salary, nor yet to embrace a life of ease and indulge the wiles of disordered passion. Christianity was synonymous with contempt, poverty, and humility. The disciple was to be like the divine Master! Oh! that we could shed tears of blood over the sad cowardice of thousands of the hapless victims of heresy who are separated from the Church of the martyrs; who, though convinced of error, sacrifice heaven to fear, to avarice, and to pride. Hapless victims of insensate folly! they seem to have found an answer to the terrible question of our blessed Lord: "What will it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"

Cyriacus was permitted by God to break awhile the repose of his princely dwelling for the fatigues of a long and perilous journey. The devil, strange to say, was true to his word, and made Cyriacus go all the way to Persia.\*

\* Although we give the strange adventure as recorded in

One morning a deputation came to the court of Rome requesting Diocletian that the deacon Cyriacus should be sent to cast out the devil from the king's daughter. The request was granted. Cyriacus, with his two companions, Smaragdus and Largus, undertook this charitable work for the greater glory of God. We have no details of this long and perilous journey; but the servants of God are happy everywhere. It matters not whether they are in a dungeon like the Mamertine, or pillowing their heads on the cold stone in the desert, under the canopy of heaven. Weeks and months of privation and of fatigue were but precious moments in which imperishable riches were gathered for the great and eternal day of repose. Arrived

the Acts, yet we must observe that there is evidently a mistake or interpolation in the word Persia. The Acts say the daughter Jobia of Sapor, King of Persia, was possessed. This could not be, as Baronius and Henschenius in the Bollandists clearly prove that there was no Sapor, King of Persia, in the time of Diocletian. He was most probably a prefect of one of the Eastern provinces, bearing a name so easily allied with the Persian dynasty. Moreover, it frequently happens in the Acts of the martyrs that the name of the reigning emperor is given to prefects of the city or other representatives; hence mistakes as to the names of places and persons very slightly affect the substantial accuracy of the fact recorded.

at the palace of the afflicted king, the conversation between the saint and the demon, as we find recorded in many exorcisms of more recent date, was mingled with ridicule and sarcasm.

Immediately after Cyriacus had entered the apartments of Jobia, the devil, speaking through her, said:

“What is the matter, Cyriacus?”

“I command you,” said the saint, “in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to leave this girl and do not trouble her any more.”

“You are tired,” said the devil.

“I have started in the name of Jesus,” said Cyriacus, “by which I am guided and protected in everything.”

“But I made you come here; I told you I would.”

Cyriacus, seeing the devil was not leaving, but becoming more impudent, prostrated himself on the ground and prayed aloud that Jesus would order the evil spirit to depart; and whilst the girl writhed very much, foaming from the mouth and biting her flesh with her teeth, the devil said, “Where, then, shall I go?”

But Cyriacus said, with greater earnestness: "It is Jesus, the Son of God, who commands thee to go."

Then, in a loud voice, the demon cried out, "O terrible name! that forces me to leave."

Jobia and all her relations were baptized; even the king and four hundred and twenty of his courtiers were received into the Church. Cyriacus remained some time to catechise and instruct his converts. On leaving, the king offered him rich presents, all of which he refused, saying, "We do not sell the grace of God for wealth; we are rewarded in seeing you embrace the faith." He remained in the palace of the Persian king for forty-five days, during which time he lived on bread and water. Returning to Rome with Smaragdus and Largus, he was received with great joy by the court of Diocletian. He retired to the house which the emperor had given him near the Baths, which were in course of construction, and prepared himself in prayer and solitude for the dark day of trial which he saw before him like clouds on the horizon.

It was the will of God to give him but two months in this retirement. If his own meditations on the vanity of the world had not convinced him of the uncertainty of the tranquillity he enjoyed, the political changes that were moving around him gave sufficient indication that he was but passing through a lull in the storm. Diocletian, surfeited in the gratification of the passions of pride and cruelty, or in imbecile fear of his heirs, from whom he had already received the suggestion of abdication, or perhaps, as we read in the Acts of St. Menna, humbled in his egregious failure of the annihilation of Christianity abandoned the court of Rome and retired to his native Dalmatia. He left the fate of a suffering people in the hands of a greater monster. He who condemned thousands of his bravest soldiers to work like slaves at the Baths, and then had them mercilessly massacred outside the walls of the city, was now permitted by God to prove with greater fury and greater power the strength of Christianity—not that the proud emperors alone might be humbled in their failure, but that future ages might

learn that the promise of Christ faileth not; that even incarnate demons could not shake the rock-built Church of Jesus.

The first act of Maximian, when left in full power of Rome, was to seize Cyriacus. He was cast into the Mamertine and loaded with chains. On the day of the emperor's feast, which was on the 1st of August, the holy martyr was obliged to assist at the procession—not in a post of honor, but dragged naked and in chains before the chariot of the tyrant. During the procession the holy Pope Marcellus, seeing the noble Cyriacus so ill-treated, and fired with that charity that can never bear with silence or indifference an insult to God, reproved the tyrant in his chariot for his injustice. He was seized, and, by the order of Maximian, bitterly scourged and banished from the city. His hour of martyrdom had not yet come. But Cyriacus and his companions, Smaragdus and Largus, with another named Crescentianus, were handed over to one of the satellites of the court, a wretch named Carpasius, well skilled in the school of merciless bloodshed.

The Temple of the Earth and the Pietra Scelerata are once more the scene of pagan weakness and Christian fortitude. The paraphernalia that constituted the ornaments of the judge's seat were racks, whips, and iron hooks—everything that could instil terror into weak humanity, but not into the martyrs of Jesus Christ.

"Why do you not obey the commands of the prince and offer expiations to the gods?" said the judge to the victims brought before him in chains.

Cyriacus read in the countenance of his companions that he should reply.

"We sacrifice to our Lord Jesus Christ."

"You won't obey, then, what you are commanded? Your age has whitened your brows, Cyriacus; but I will make them young for you."

He ordered molten pitch to be poured on the head of Cyriacus. Whilst suffering this excruciating torture the holy martyr, believing it would bring death, cried out: "Glory be to God! He has opened for me the gates of his celestial kingdom!"

Crescentianus next attracted the cruel Carpassius. He had him stretched on the rack before the others and beaten with clubs until the martyr's spirit fled to its Creator.

Enough of the cruel feast for that day. Cast them into the Mamertine, and let them think over what they have seen. Double their chains, and give them no food; the gods have greater torments in store for those refractory Christians.

Four days were given for the fulfilment of this portion of the programme of cruelty. Then Cyriacus is brought forth alone, and, being asked by the judge why he wished to end his old age in torments, he bravely replied that it was the sigh of his life to suffer for God.

"Sacrifice, and you may live!" said Carpassius.

"Let those sacrifice who do not know their Creator, our Lord Jesus Christ. I will not!" firmly replied Cyriacus.

The aged Christian was stretched on the rack, beaten, and torn with hooks. Whilst yet suffering every species of

cruelty in the Temple of the Earth Carpasius sent over to Maximian, whose palace was but a few paces across the Via Sacra, for further directions as to what he should do with Cyriacus. Perhaps the judge was afraid to take on himself the death of such a man, the friend of Diocletian, whose fame had spread over the city; but Maximian ordered him and all his companions to be beheaded at once on the Via Salaria. Twenty-one noble souls were conducted to the gardens of Sallust, outside the walls, and, together with Cyriacus, the intrepid leader of so many brave bands of martyrs, they passed from the sorrows of life to their crowns of glory.

#### IV.

ABOUT the middle of the ninth century three holy sisters of the consul Albericus had elected to serve God in holy chastity and community of life. They built a convent and small church in the Via Lata, on the site on which the Church of St. Marcellus now stands. At the same time a relative or friend had lived a holy life

as a hermit at the Catacombs of St. Calistus. As a holy friendship existed between these souls, the sisters asked the hermit one day if he knew in the Catacombs of any relics that they could bring to enrich their church. He replied that he had found the tomb of St. Cyriacus, and that he would show it to them if they would come and take the holy relics. They came and saw the tomb, having this inscription :

“Hic reconditum est corpus  
Almi Levitæ et martyris Cyriaci,  
A matrona Lucina positum.”

Having opened the tomb, they found the head and arm of the saint. But Almighty God, who has a special providence over the relics of the saints, would not allow them to be stirred; the relics were so fastened to the tomb that the sisters, notwithstanding their pious motives, could not move them. Frightened at this miracle, but not discouraged, they prayed and fasted, that the saint might come with them, and made a vow they would build a suitable sanctuary and enrich it with valuable gifts if the favor were granted. These petitions were accepted by God, and he

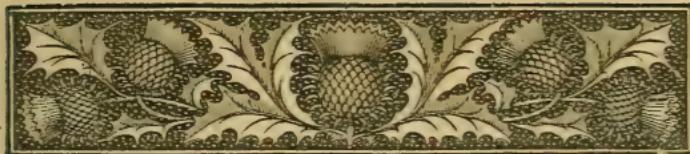
permitted the holy relics to be removed. With a magnificent procession and great crowds the relics were brought to the chapel of these pious sisters. Several times on the journey the relics became so heavy that no power could move them, until the sisters, by prayers and tears, procured the favor wished for. The holy Pope Agapitus II. was present at this translation, and ordered the convent founded by the sisters to be called after the saint's name. All traces of this convent have been lost.

We have another extraordinary miracle recorded to have taken place by these relics in the year 1233. A holy priest, named Henry, from the Monastery of St. Cyriacus, in Gernrode, in Saxony, made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, and on his return came to Rome to visit the shrine of the apostles and venerate the relics of his patron. He prayed with great devotion and shed many tears before the tomb of this glorious martyr. After his devotions, as if inspired by God, he expressed his wish to see the relics, asserting that God had frequently per-

mitted the devout clients of the martyrs to see the very wounds by which they had suffered, fresh and bleeding as when inflicted. He roused the curiosity of the good sisters, who consequently made a fervent appeal to the priest Benedictus, who was in charge of the church, that he would permit them to see the relics. The request, springing from a lawful and rational devotion, was granted, and behold Almighty God performed a great miracle in honor of his martyred servant, Cyriacus. When the silver case in which the relics were preserved was opened, the blood was flowing afresh from the veins of the neck as when cut by the sword of the executioner. The vessel was full of fresh and warm blood. The extraordinary fact was seen by the whole city. Thousands flocked around, and for nine days the little church was crowded day and night with people. The holy relics with the blood were carried in procession through the city, when several miracles were performed. A blind woman received her sight; another, paralyzed on one side, was instantly cured on recommending herself to the saint.

Strange to say, the priest Henry, who was the instrument of this manifestation of the relics, was never seen after the opening of the case. There is a pious tradition amongst the people that this Henry was the saint himself, permitted to come from heaven to rouse devotion and proclaim the greater glory of God, “who is wonderful in his saints.”





## CHAPTER XVIII.

### CONCLUSION.

THERE is a shadow round the holy dead,  
A mystery wherein we seem to tread,  
As oft their lineaments of life awake,  
And sorrowing thoughts their hallowed semblance  
take.

What once they dreamt, when mortal nature threw  
Phantasmal dimness round their soaring view,  
Now, all unearthed, beatified, and free  
From toils and tears, the unscaled eye can see.  
No more on them the fitful whirl of things,  
From joy to gloom, eternal trial brings.  
Arrayed in light, before the throne they shine,  
And fathom mysteries of love divine :  
Why tears were shed, why pangs of woe prevailed,  
Why goodness mourned, and virtue often failed ;  
No longer now a withering shadow throws,  
Like that which hangs around the world's repose.

MONTGOMERY.

**E**ARLY in the fourth century, when Constantine aided the Christians in selecting for posterity those places that were sanctified by the sufferings, the miracles, and the triumphs of the

martyrs, the dungeons of the Mamertine were consecrated to God. Pope Sylvester, who baptized Constantine,\* and to whom we owe the preservation of the most remarkable shrines of the early Church, had a special devotion to this prison, whose historic page is tinged with such bitter mementos of sorrow. If we are to believe a letter attributed to St. Jerome, and given at the end of his works, this prison was the next after St. Peter's to attract the devotion of the holy Pope, who, together with the convert-emperor, was guided by the divine Spirit to mark out and protect the sacred shrines of the early Church.

In the days of paganism the 1st of August was consecrated to the divinity of the living emperor. It was Cæsar's feast-day. Triumphal arches, gorgeous processions, games, and idolatrous sacrifices were lavished in honor of the ruling god. The festival was kept up for several days, but its celebrations were orgies of licentious revel, and, like the demon-worship of

\* We believe it is erroneously asserted by some historians that Constantine was baptized by Eusebius.

other idols, a stain of infamy in the records of paganism.

When the cross was now the banner of the legions; when the sublime morality of Christianity had assumed the direction of the people, and Constantine, the vessel of election, ruled the conquered empire in all the humility of a Christian king, these immoral and licentious honors were prohibited. In their stead were introduced public devotions in honor of the Prince of the Apostles, the revered founder of the spiritual dynasty of "the unsceptred Sovereign who still rules from his tomb."

In the letter alluded to, written by St. Jerome, the emperor is said to have used these words to Pope Sylvester: "Heretofore, according to the profane customs of our fathers, I enjoyed the privileges of those days like others; but, since it has pleased God to make me, a sinner, his servant, I see the iniquity of these unbecoming celebrations. Say, therefore, how I may dedicate them to the one God, and in honor of blessed Peter, the apostle."\*

\* Quoted in Cancellieri, page 70.

Sylvester, being much pleased, replied: "There is a prison where the blessed Peter, the apostle, suffering for Christ, and by the saving waters of the miraculous fountain, baptized many. Cleanse this prison from all filth and dirt; make it a church, where the faithful can offer their devotions in honor of the holy apostle."

Constantine accordingly had the place cleaned out, and erected a sanctuary over the prison, which was consecrated by the same Pope Sylvester. Here for many years were preserved the chains of St. Peter, and from a twofold source came the title of "Peter in Chains." The chains and the title were removed in the fifth century to the superb edifice erected on the Esquiline by the repentant Eudoxia. Although some doubt has been cast upon the authorship of the letter attributed to St. Jerome, there is no doubt as to the fact it records. The dedication of the Mamertine by Pope Sylvester to the worship of God is maintained by constant tradition and mentioned by several ancient historians of note. In one of the inscriptions in the prison we read: "Divus Syl-

vester Papa, Constantini magni precibus,  
hoc carcer in ecclesiam dicavit."\*

A favorite English author gives a fair picture of the sanctuary as it now stands: "This chamber is now fitted up as an oratory, dedicated to the saint; and it lives as a distinct and separate place in my recollection too. It is very small and low-roofed, and the dread and gloom of the ponderous old prison are upon it, as if they came up in the dark mist from the floor. Hanging on the walls, amongst the clustered votive offerings, are, at once strangely in keeping and strangely at variance with the place, rusty daggers, knives, pistols, clubs, and divers instruments of violence and murder brought here fresh from use, and hung up to propitiate offended heaven, as if the blood upon them would drain off in consecrated air and have no voice to cry with. It is all so silent and close and tomb-like, and the dungeons below so black and stealthy and stagnant and naked, that this little, dark spot becomes a dream within a

\* The blessed Sylvester, Pope, at the request of Constantine the Great, consecrated this prison into a church.

dream; and in the vision of great changes that come rolling past me like a sea it is a small wave by itself, that melts into no other wave, and does not flow on with the rest.”\*

One of the most remarkable of the ancient crucifixes in Rome is now preserved in this little chapel. It has a tradition around it that carries us far back to the Middle Ages. As a work of art it is rude and repulsive; but in its charming, unwritten history we find the hidden attraction that fills the little capella with offerings and with worshippers, who pour in devout crowds from dawn to dawn, seeking and finding consolation amidst the sombre reminiscences of this hallowed spot. The prison, wrapt up with the early history of the Church; the crucifix, the emblem of all sorrow and of all joy, before which generations of pious Romans have knelt and prayed; and the adorable presence of the loving Victim of the tabernacle, casting from his throne of mercy floods of spiritual light through the low

\* “*Pictures in Italy.*”

and dark prison-vault, render this shrine the most attractive in Rome.

Consolation to the afflicted is the devotion of the Mamertine. As the Church of the Miraculous Crib has attractions for childhood; as the Madonna del Parto, in St. Augustine's, is enriched with the votive offerings of the young and newly married, so the sigh of age and affliction has sustained through centuries the echo of human suffering so historically in keeping with the lugubrious memories that hang around these dungeons of pagan tyranny.

Characteristic of the simplicity of Roman piety is an anecdote told in connection with the old cross of the Mamertine. A poor woman had a refractory husband. Cards, late hours, and drink had brought him to ruin, and the dismal curse that blights every earthly comfort in the home of the intemperate was marking his downfall in greater and greater want and sorrow. The wife, virtuous and faithful in her misery, prayed and wept and hoped; but, in the mystery of unanswered prayer, her troubles continued. At length she was recommended by her pious con-

fessor to make a novena to the *crocifisso* of the Mamertine. She did so. However, long before the novena was finished, she ceased to kneel amongst the heavy-laden and burdened who told their troubles to the consoling God who lived and reigned in the prison. The pastor, meeting her some time afterwards, enquired for her erring husband. Full of gratitude, she thanked him for his good advice; for her troubles were all over. On the good priest expressing a hope that now he would continue to go to church and keep sober, she interrupted him by saying there was no fear of his ever again troubling her; for she had no sooner complained of him to the *crocifisso* of the Mamertine than the poor man took sick and died.

Beatrice Cenci! Who has not heard of the turbaned beauty immortalized by the pencil of Guido? Two hundred orphan children prayed for her and made long, penitential processions to the cross of the Mamertine. She had won their sympathy by large alms; but the heavens seemed made of brass, and nothing could change

the stern resolve of the guardians of the law. Unmoved by the touching appeal of angelic beauty, the claims of wealth and nobility, and the tears of orphan children whom the beautiful maiden promised to endow, the executioners of Cenci proclaimed their inviolable regard for the law, that found her, on circumstantial evidence, guilty of murder. At the very moment the orphan children were kneeling, and perhaps weeping, around the Sanctuary of the Mamertine, the headsman decapitated Beatrice, and, holding the head to the infuriated mob, and amidst groans and hisses, cried out: "Behold the head of a murderer!"

Amidst much that is true and much that is false regarding the story of the ill-fated Cenci we must confess we have a share in the sympathy which history flings around her untimely end, not so much because of the fabulous beauty and wealth that fancy and art have gilded around her name, but because of the unanswered character of the last and thrilling appeal made, from a religious motive, at this venerable sanctuary, where so many others

have found consolation and joy. But the day of judgment will reveal in the secret ways of Providence that the seemingly hapless maiden, like many other victims of unanswered prayer, has been made the recipient of blessings far more desirable than the favor denied.

Not only in centuries gone by, but in modern days, the devotion to the cross of the Mamertine has been the most popular in Rome. Other sanctuaries are filled with enthusiastic crowds on the annual celebration of their festival; but the Mamertine, like the steady flow of its miraculous fountain, is ever filled with its votaries.

Before leaving this hallowed and sombre shrine, looking through the low arches over the silent worshippers at the dark, rude crucifix, contrasting with the thousands of bright offerings, the thought steals over us that the cross is not only the emblem of faith and consolation, but it is the monogram of Christian triumph. The places that were sanctified by Christian blood or Christian suffering are now under the saving shadow of the cross. In

silent eloquence, surmounting the ruins of the old city, it proclaims its own triumph in the very places where all the might of paganism struggled to cast it into the dust.

The Capitol was the centre of the executive power. The decrees conceived with diabolical cruelty in the hearts of the pagan rulers found the sword of execution and details of their horrors in the chambers of the Capitol. Yet the highest thing on this memorable hill, far away on the top of the mediæval tower that crowns the modern edifice, the Roman soldier carries on the tapering staff of his banner a small but graceful cross !

On the piazza of St. Peter's—the gardens of Nero—the scene of the first persecution, where the blood of the Christians ran twelve inches deep, on a gigantic pyramid of granite cut from the quarries of Egypt some three thousand years ago, we behold, in artistic as well as Christian triumph, the cross !

For two hundred years the cross cast its saving shadow on the blood-stained arena of the Coliseum. Alas ! it is not

there now. The modern desecrators of the sacred memories of Christian Rome deemed the cross not in keeping with the pagan character of the ruin. But its temporary absence from this Calvary of the martyrs will serve to endear and enhance the triumph it will again achieve over its enemies.

Amidst the crumbling masses of the golden house where emperors and prefects poured forth their many blasphemies, where the guiltless followers of the cross were tortured, where Satan revelled for centuries in debauchery and immorality, the Convent of the Visitation raises its tinted walls amidst a grove of pines, and on the painted cupola of the cloister we recognize a gilded cross!

Carved on the ancient gates of the city and the ruins of pagan temples, sanctifying the entrance to the Catacombs, emblazoned in gold and diamonds in the tiara of its king, and impressed on the hearts and history of its people, Rome has adopted the cross as the arms of its crest and shield, and the mystic emblem of its eternal triumph!

The cross in the Mamertine over the dungeons of the first pontiff has for eleven centuries preached its moving, touching, silent sermon; the darkest hour of trial must give way to the sunshine of joy, now rising on the horizon of time, banishing the darkness of our hour of trial, and enveloping in floods of golden splendor those who glory in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.











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